



# 2<sup>ND</sup> International Annual October Conference on Education and Lifelong Learning 2015

“Post 2015 Development Agenda:  
Moving Education Forward”

**CONFERENCE PROCEEDINGS / WORKING PAPERS / VOLUME ONE**



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# SCHOOL OF EDUCATION FUNDAMENTAL STATEMENTS

## **Vision Statement**

To be a globally competitive hub of education development  
professionalization of educators, educationalists, researchers and mentors

## **Mission Statement**

To provide exemplary leadership in transformative skill-based education  
services founded on quality teaching and learning, research, innovation,  
and life-long community service

## **Philosophy**

Quality education for the service of humanity

## **Core Values**

Honesty, respect, integrity, team spirit, democracy, inclusivity, transparency  
and accountability

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## MESSAGE FROM CONFERENCE CHAIR

The School of Education, Kenyatta University successfully hosted the 2nd International Annual Conference on Education and Lifelong Learning at Kenyatta University, on 8th-9th October 2015, dubbed “*the KU October Conference on Education*”. The conference was graced by renowned educationalists, namely, Dr. Evangeline Njoka (Chief Guest Speaker and First Chief Executive Officer of the Kenya National Commission for UNESCO); Prof. Kabiru Kinyanjui (Keynote speaker and International Development and Education consultant); Prof. Alemayehu Bishaw (Keynote Speaker and Associate Professor, Dean Graduate Studies, Bahir Dar University, Ethiopia); Dr. John Mugo (Guest Speaker and Director, Data and Voice, Uwezo, East Africa) and Dr. Hellen Amunga (Host Speaker and Lecturer, Department of Educational Communication and Technology, Kenyatta University). These high profile speakers provided the framework for thematic discussions guided by expertise, experience and knowledge in education and the various thematic areas of the conference.

The conference was organised to fall in October, which is the month the World Teachers’ Day (October 5) is celebrated globally. The conference theme titled, “*Post 2015 Development Agenda: Moving Education Forward*” helped to accommodate a variety of relevant sub-themes that allowed the authors to address salient concerns in education in context of accomplishments of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and recasted in the era of Post 2015 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The sub-themes covered in this issue focus on educational processes including pedagogy, curriculum development, use of technology and innovation, equity and inclusiveness, educational management and transformation, as well as planning for the overall quality of education. In this context, the conference was able to pursue its core objective of providing a structured platform via which education scholars, policy makers, practitioners, and students disseminate and share knowledge generated through research in the field of education under the chosen broad theme.

Being a relatively young conference that was launched on 31st October 2014, it is indeed a great pleasure to witness the fruition of this publication which adds value to our October Conference which, without doubt, enhances the mandate of disseminating evidence-based knowledge, elicit wider feedback from readers and motivate further discussions and research on topical educational issues. This publication goes a long way to strengthen the processes of conferencing beyond the event of the conference *per se*. I therefore take this opportunity, on behalf of the Conference Committee and on my own behalf, to wish you meaningful and enjoyable readership and welcome you to the forthcoming Annual October Conference.



**Prof. Fatuma Chege**

Chairperson, Conference Organising Committee &  
Dean, School of Education, Kenyatta University

January 2016

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# CONFERENCE PROGRAMME

**2nd International Conference on Education and Lifelong Learning  
8th -9th October 2015**

**School of education, Kenyatta University**

**THEME: POST-2015 DEVELOPMENT AGENDA: MOVING EDUCATION FORWARD**

**Sub-themes:**

1. Education and Emerging Issues
2. Research in Education Policy and Planning
3. ICT, Virtual Learning Technology in Education
4. Quality Education and Transformative Leadership
5. Education and Equity, Gender, Culture and Marginalisation
6. Teaching in Diversity and the Teaching Profession

# EXAMINATION OF QUALITY EDUCATION IN PRIVATE PRIMARY SCHOOLS IN KENYA: THE CASE OF WESTLANDS SUB COUNTY IN NAIROBI COUNTY

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## Abstract

There is concern over the quality of education offered in Kenya's private primary schools, especially in the face of challenges graduates of these schools face when they transit to secondary schools. This paper is based on the findings of a study done in 5 purposively selected private primary schools in Westlands Sub-County, Nairobi County. The objectives of the study were to: Establish the type of curriculum children are exposed to in private primary schools, explore teaching strategies adopted by teachers in private primary schools, identify the available learner support facilities in private primary schools and explore strategies adopted by the private primary school stakeholders to post good results in national exams. The study adopted a descriptive survey research design. From the target population a sample of 160 respondents (5 head teachers, 30 teachers, 100 pupils and 25 parents) participated in the study. Data was collected using questionnaires, observation guides and interview schedules. Quantitative data was analyzed using quantitative approaches whereas qualitative data was analyzed thematically. Findings revealed that the curriculum in the selected schools matched with the recommended curriculum in public schools albeit with a few additional subjects and that teacher pedagogies were guided by the mean score. This determined the teacher-pupil activities in and out of class. Findings also showed that pupils had minimal time for socialization and co-curricular activities for fear that this would rob them of valuable study time. It was further revealed that rote learning was encouraged and that pupils did not internalize content taught. The pupils felt overwhelmed with school work both at home and at school. Based on these findings, the study concluded that the education offered in some private primary schools was deceptive and lopsided as it impacted negatively on the pupils' social life and the aspect of quality of education as envisaged. The study recommended that MOEST ensures holistic approach is adopted if quality education has to retain its meaning and that teaching should also be focused on acquisition of problem solving skills.

**Key Words:** Quality education, Private Schools, pedagogy, teaching and teaching resources

## Introduction

There is concern over the quality of education offered in Kenya's private primary schools, especially in the face of declining performance in the sister public primary schools (Ogola, 2010) and the challenges the graduates of these private schools face when they transit to secondary schools (Attard, 2015). McGee et al (2003) have affirmed that there is often a decline in achievement following student transition from primary to secondary schools. Schools that post good results in exams are presumed to be offering quality education and private primary schools have reportedly posted good results in national exams.

In Nairobi County in the years 2010-2013, some of the best scorers in KCPE examination came from private primary schools in Westlands Sub County of Nairobi County (County Education Office, Nairobi County 2015). The overall mean mark in Westlands during the period was 260 marks out of the possible 500 marks. Interestingly, the quality of education in schools has been equated to the achievement level of students in exams (Siringi, 2011) and not the overall pupil experience.

Education quality is an aspect that continues receiving the attention of education providers worldwide (UNESCO, 2005, Robin, 2008, Benoit, 2013). The United Nations Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) in their Education For All (EFA) monitoring report

(UNESCO, 2005) stressed that the achievement of universal participation in education would mainly depend upon the quality of education available. The Dakar Framework for Action had earlier in 2000 postulated that quality of education was a prime determinant of whether Education for All is achieved.

The Dakar Framework for Action defined quality education as an education that satisfies basic learning needs and enriches the lives of learners and their overall experiences (Robin, 2008). The Framework further provided conditions for the best education of quality which includes the use of active learning techniques, availability of adequate facilities and learning materials and a relevant curriculum. The framework also stressed that the environment should be welcoming, gender sensitive, healthy and safe for learners to acquire quality education.

In the Kenyan context, student scores in exams are considered critical indicators in defining quality in education (Benoit, 2013). If student achievement levels are low -- manifested in a school's low test scores, high dropout and repetition rates-- the school allegedly is of low quality. Releasing the 2011 KCPE results, the then Kenyan Minister for Education, Prof Sam Ongeri, equated the students who had scored good marks to having received quality education (Siringi, 2011). In Nairobi County and more specifically in Westlands Sub County most of the best scorers were pupils from private primary schools.

**Table 1:** Sub county KCPE order of merit (2010-2013)

S/N	Sub County Name	2013 average mark (rank)	2012 (rank)	2011 (rank)	2010 (rank)
1.	Westland	260 (1)	255 (1)	254 (1)	260 (1)
2.	Embakasi	255 (2)	253 (2)	254 (1)	257 (2)
3.	Langata	250 (3)	249 (3)	250 (3)	254 (3)
4.	Makadara	250 (4)	246 (4)	242 (4)	243 (4)
5.	Kamukunji	245 (5)	241 (5)	234 (5)	233 (5)
6.	Kasarani	232 (6)	233 (6)	224 (6)	229 (6)
7.	Dagoretti	230 (7)	220 (9)	216 (9)	215 (8)
8.	Starehe	225 (8)	224 (8)	224 (6)	222 (7)
9	Njiru	222 (9)	227 (7)	219 (8)	215(8)

Source: County Education Office, Nairobi County, 2014

(Note: There was no ranking in 2014 due to the ministerial ban on school ranking. The Sub County positions are in brackets)

## Statement of the Problem

Pupils from private primary schools in Kenya have been doing exceptionally well in the Kenya Certificate of Primary Examinations (KCPE) (Kenyaschoolreport.com). In the 2014 KCPE, for example, some of the best pupils reportedly came from private primary schools in Nairobi County. Similarly in 2010, 2011, 2012 and 2013 candidates from private primary schools from Nairobi County again emerged among the top scorers (KenyaSchoolReport.com). However, despite these pupils attaining impressive marks some of them often do not end up doing as well in subsequent stages. This therefore raises a concern on the quality of education they received during the foundational years in the primary schools attended. The problem of this study was to assess whether students from private schools necessarily receive quality education just because they post good scores in exams. Can quality education be tied to the grades pupils score in an exam?

## Objectives of the Study

The objectives of this study were to:

1. Establish the type of curriculum pupils are exposed to in private primary schools.
2. Explore teaching strategies adopted in private primary schools.
3. Identify the available learner support facilities in private primary schools.
4. Explore strategies adopted by the private primary school stakeholders to post good results in national exams.

## Research Questions

The study investigated the following questions based on these objectives:

1. What type of curriculum are pupils in private primary schools exposed to?
2. What teaching strategies do teachers in private primary schools adopt in offering quality education?
3. What learner support facilities are available in private primary schools?
4. What are the strategies adopted by the private primary school stakeholders to post good results in national exams?

## Theoretical Framework

This study was guided by the conflict theory as advanced by the German philosopher and scholar Karl Marx (1818-1883). According to the theory, society is in a state of perpetual conflict due to competition for limited resources. In the field of education, there are limited resources and opportunities which all learners must compete to get. The fact that pupils from private primary schools are fighting to get a stake at these limited opportunities pushes teachers and parents to adopt strategies that will propel the pupils to a level where they can successfully compete for these opportunities. The pressure to succeed comes from within the school as well as outside the school.

The conflict theory also directs us to question broader structures and ideological values within the society by stressing the connections between these broader contradictions and the personal stresses that people experience in their own day today life. The teachers as trained professionals know what the best approaches in teaching and in giving learners holistic education are yet they fall into pressure for the sake of attaining good mean scores. The teachers are forced to use whatever means possible to attain these ideal scores. The strategies they are forced to use may sometimes be in conflict and contradiction to their way of training and their own cherished values.

## Conceptual Framework

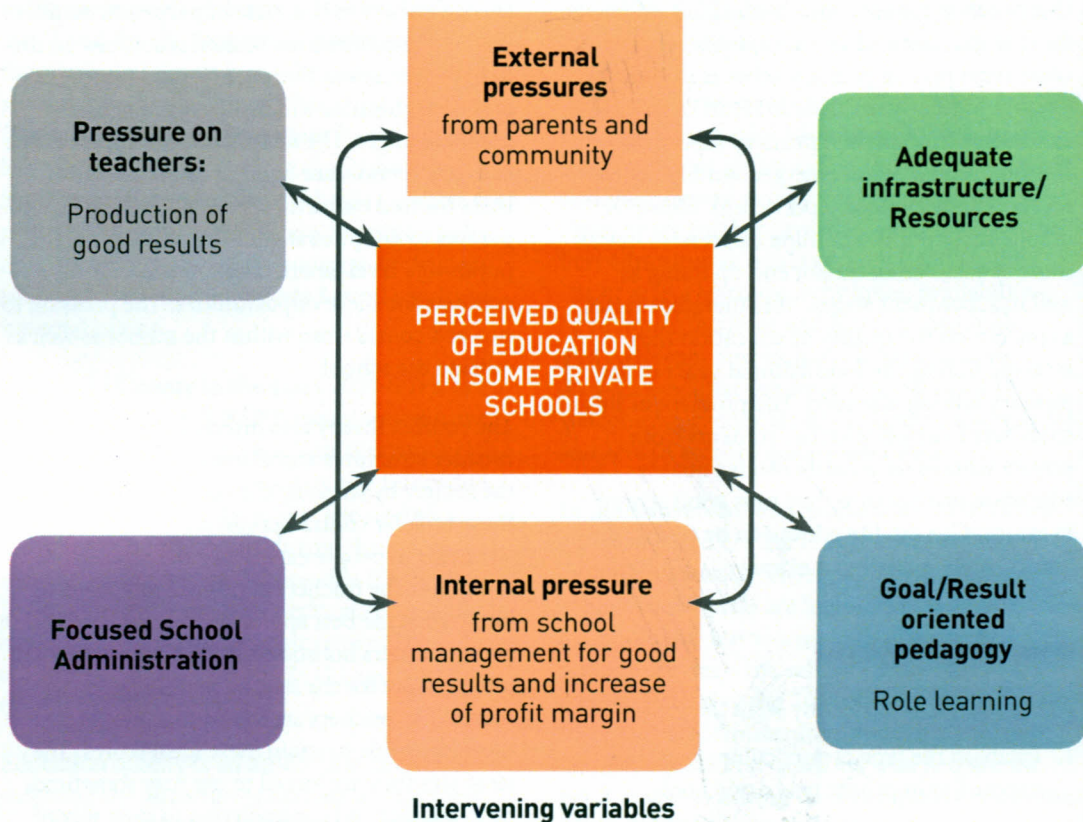
The perceived quality of education in private primary schools arises out of four main factors:

1. Focused school management to post good results
2. Pressure on the teachers to post good results
3. Adequacy of school facilities in the teaching learning process
4. Pedagogy tailored to encourage rote learning and recall of information.

Subsequently from these four factors highlighted, pupils post good results in examinations owing to their ability to reproduce facts which have been acquired through rote learning. Such knowledge is superficial since the knowledge is not internalized by the pupils. This lack of internalization arises from lack of sufficient time as well as internal pressures from the school administration and external pressures from

the community to post good results by all means. The resultant grades attained out of this intense pressure is what is often perceived as constituting quality education.

**Figure 1:** Conceptual framework



## Methodology

**Research design:** The study adopted a descriptive survey research design.

**Location of the study:** The study was located in Westlands Sub County, Nairobi. Westlands Sub County is one of the nine (9) administrative Sub Counties in Nairobi County. The Sub County has some of the well equipped private primary schools which produce good results in the Kenya Certificate of Primary Education examinations.

**Target population and sample size:** the study targeted all 60 registered private primary schools in Westlands Sub County (Overall there are 545 registered private primary schools in Nairobi County).

**Sample size and sampling procedures:** The study was done in five (5) purposively sampled private primary schools in the Westlands division of Nairobi County. These schools were chosen on the basis of their relatively persistent good performance in the Kenya Certificate of Primary Education. Head teachers were selected so long as their schools were selected. Teachers who had stayed in their current schools for more than eight years and had institutional memory of their schools were sampled for the study. Parents who were at the time of the study found at the sampled schools were selected and formed a study sample. Random sampling was done in order to select pupils who were in standard eight (8) in their respective schools. In total 5 head teachers, 30 teachers, 100 students and 25 parents participated in the study. Table 1 below provides a summary of the respondents.

**Table 2:** Summary of sample respondents

S/N	School	No. of head teachers (n=5)	No. of teachers (n=15)	No. of students (n=50)	No. of parents (n=25)	Total respondents per school
1	School A	1	6	20	5	32
2	School B	1	6	20	6	33
3	School C	1	6	20	4	31
4	School D	1	6	20	3	30
5	School E	1	6	20	7	34
	<b>Totals</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>160</b>

**Instrumentation:** Data was collected using researcher questionnaires, observation guides and interview schedules.

**Piloting:** The instruments were piloted in one of the county primary schools in Nairobi. The purpose was to check for reliability and validity of those instruments. Thereafter, adjustments were done accordingly.

**Analysis of data:** The collected data from the questionnaires, interviews and observation techniques was analyzed qualitatively. In addition, descriptive statistics was employed in order to tease out frequencies and percentages.

## Findings

### Curriculum

The findings indicated that private primary schools offering the 8-4-4 system of education offered the normal curriculum like in all other public primary schools (English, Mathematics, Science, CRE/IRE, Social Studies, Physical Education, Kiswahili, Life skills). However, it was also found out that besides the normal curriculum 60 per cent (3 out of the 5 sampled) schools offered additional subjects such as computer studies, French and arts. These subjects are non examinable at the end of the class eight cycle and the schools may be using them as 'bait' to attract students to enrol in the schools.

### Pupils' exposure to curricular activities

Respondents were asked what co-curricular activities the students were exposed to. All the pupils (100 per cent) indicated that they had provision for Physical Education (PE) on their timetable. However, findings indicated that as

the students approached the candidate classes, the PE lesson would often be skipped and the time used to cover an area that the teacher felt needed to be covered. This finding was given by 80 per cent of the students.

On being asked the possible reasons for such a state of affairs, the head teachers and teachers indicated that PE was viewed as a waste of time since it was not one of the examinable subjects. Other activities mentioned by over 50 per cent of the students in which their school participated in albeit with less emphasis was Music and clubs such as Scouts and Environmental. However findings indicated that these activities were done either in the afternoon or in the evening when the students were tired and prepared to leave for home.

Majority of the respondents (95 per cent of students, (85 per cent) teachers and 85 per cent of the parents) indicated that pupils' time was occupied with academic work. In this regard, they had no free time to socialize with their peers. Interview with the respondents revealed that co-curricular activities were sparingly allowed for fear of robbing pupils of valuable study time.

### How pupils spent time while at school

Information gleaned on how pupils spent a typical day in school showed that pupils had a programmed schedule which they strictly followed. The pupils confessed that they were closely monitored so that they do not waste time on what was considered 'non-academic' activities. Data from the interviews showed that a normal working day for a pupil starts in the morning at around 5.30am for more than 75 per cent of the pupils and extended sometimes to around 10pm at night after finalizing on assignments

given. The pupils indicated that waking up early was critical for them to catch the bus to school or catch up with school work. This according to the researcher indicated that the students were stretched with academic work dominating their daily life. This overemphasis on academic work though beneficial goes counter to the definition of quality education which according to The Dakar Framework for Action is an education which should enrich the lives of learners and their overall experiences (Robin, 2008).

### Pedagogical approaches employed in private primary schools

Data concerning teaching approaches commonly employed by the teachers in the sampled private schools are captured in Table 3 : The sampled teachers indicated that majority of them (80 per cent ) used the lecture method, drilling (73 per cent ) and rote learning 73 per cent . Occasionally the teaching was reinforced by use of question and answer technique. In a visit to primary schools in Kenya Benoit (2013), an education researcher, had made the following observations.

*I also noted the predominance of a rote learning style of teaching while visiting a number of primary schools. The teachers that I observed lectured on a topic for a large portion of a lesson and then questioned students to see what they were able to absorb. I did not observe any inter pupil interactions or discussions during class time. Rather, students spent the remainder of the class silently copying notes and answering questions from the board.'*

Findings from the research showed that approaches which increase student mastery of content were minimally utilized. During the interview 10 out of the 15 teachers indicated relying on the lecture method as it allowed time for coverage of the syllabus which they

considered wide. This finding is congruent with what Digolo (2009) says:

*classroom teachers have responded to the problem posed by the curriculum to adopt strategies of teaching such as demonstration instead of experimenting method, lecturing method instead of discussion method and classroom -based teaching instead of field study trips to be able to complete the syllabus (Digolo, 2009:90).*

Use of such strategies does not allow pupils to internalize the content taught. Mburu et al (2014) emphasise on the need for teachers to use appropriate and effective instructional methods so that students can easily transfer what is taught in school and apply it to solve problems in real life and not just to pass exams.

Observation of actual class teaching collaborated use of these teacher-oriented approaches. Only 12 (40 per cent ) teachers out of the 30 involved in the study indicated that they often put their students in groups or even took them out for practical sessions. This, as pointed out by Gakure et al (2013), denies learners an opportunity to participate in knowledge acquisition.

The study revealed that 70 per cent of the teachers said that they tactfully forced pupils to memorize some aspects of the content they taught through what they called mnemonics. This according to them could make it easy for the students to recall the facts during exams. Over 70 per cent of pupils collaborated the use of this strategy. They gave an example of the word SINZOYANYASOMI that they were forced to memorize to indicate the rivers draining to Lake Victoria. These initials stand for rivers Sio, Nzoia, Yala, Nyando, Sondu -Miriu, Migori etc.

**Table 3:** Teaching approaches commonly adopted by teachers in private primary schools

S/N	Method Indicate by ticking whether you often use the following teaching strategies in your school	Frequency Number of teachers who indicated often using this method (n=30)	%
1.	Lecture method	18	60%
2.	Group discussions	12	40%
3.	Question-answer technique	24	80%
4.	Field excursions and trips	14	47%
5.	Practical sessions	12	40%
7.	Drilling	22	73%

## Do the teachers, school administrations and parents know the best teaching methods?

As a follow up to the teaching strategies teachers used, the respondents were asked whether they were conversant with the best teaching methods likely to bring about holistic development of the learner. 18 out of 30 of the teachers affirmed that they knew the best approaches as they had been taught about them during the preparatory time in college. The teachers however said that if they faithfully followed these approaches they would not cover the syllabus or that the scores may could not be as good as they were. They confessed using the approaches that worked for them in terms of getting enviable scores. One teacher states thus, 'My continued service in this school depends on my pupils' performance in exams. If they pass well I am assured of my contract being renewed'. It looks as though then pedagogical approaches in private primary schools are outcome oriented.

## Strategies used by the private schools to ensure good results

Responses from the teachers (30), pupils (100) and the head teachers (5) in Table 4 indicated

that the private primary schools used a variety of techniques to ensure their schools posted good results. These methods ranged from interviewing new pupils, ensuring only competitive pupils are enrolled to asking the weak ones to repeat classes even when this goes against the stated policy of the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology (MOEST).

The diverse approaches used to enhance 'good' performance in exams and which is deemed as quality education (Siringi, 2013) is captured in Table 4.

What emerged from the study was that weak pupils were forced to repeat or look for alternative schools or in other cases forced to register for examination in either public schools or other low cost private primary schools. During the interview the head teachers and teachers indicate that poor results would affect the school profit margin as it could reduce demand for the school. Therefore they ensured that only academically strong pupils were presented for examination.

**Table 4:** Methods used by the private schools to ensure good results

S/N	Methods used to ensure good results	Head teachers frequencies (n=5)	%	Teachers Frequencies (n=30)	%	Student Frequencies (n=100)	%
1.	Interviewing students before admission	4	80%	20	67%	70	70%
2	Asking students to repeat a class	2	40%	10	33%	30	43%
3	Asking a weak pupil to transfer to another school	2	40%	14	47%	20	20%
4	Pairing pupils with bright ones	4	80%	24	80%	70	70%
5	Offering remedial classes to pupils	5	100%	30	100%	90	90%
6	Giving pupils additional work to do after class	5	100%	22	73%	90	90%
7	Providing incentives to pupils and teachers who show academic improvement	4	80%	26	87%	80	80%
8.	Registering weak pupils in low cost or public schools	2	40%	24	80%	90	90%

### Adequacy of infrastructure in private primary schools

The private schools included in the study had adequate infrastructure. This is evident from the data gathered using an observation checklist. This is unlike public primary school which Benoit (2013) notes lack vital teaching resources and materials as well as physical facilities critical for academic achievement. All the schools sampled were day private primary schools. The classes were built of stone, and were spacious with ample space in between the desks.

All the schools had a playground though for 2 (40 per cent ) schools the playground looked small in comparison to the students enrolled Table 5 below provides a summary of the schools' infrastructural facilities. In general the findings showed that the sampled private primary schools were not lacking in material resources and facilities. This was collaborated by head teacher interviews. The parents interviewed also indicated that they ensured that their children were adequately provided for with learning resources.

**Table 5:** Infrastructure in the sampled private primary schools

S/N	Infrastructure/ Resources Available	Frequency n=5	%
1.	Administrative office	5	100%
2.	Separate staff room	5	100%
3.	Enough classes	5	100%
4.	Girls' and boys' toilets	5	100%
5.	Play ground	3	60%
6.	Computer room	3	60%
7.	Store	3	60%
8.	Library	4	80%
9.	School bus	5	100%
10.	Adequate Desks and chairs	4	80%
11.	Hall	3	60%

### Strategies employed by parents to ensure students post good results in private primary schools

All the 25 (100 per cent) parents who participated in the study were interviewed on the strategies they employed to ensure that their children in private primary schools performed well in the final exams. Different strategies as shown in Table 6 were used.

**Table 6:** Strategies employed by parents ensure good performance in private primary schools

S/N	Strategy	frequency	%
1.	Paying teachers to coach their children during the school time	20	80%
2.	Engaging private teachers during the weekends and holidays	23	92%
3.	Ensuring their children revise while at home	19	76%
4.	Ensuring pupils never wasted time with friends	22	88%

It is evident from the percentages in Table 6 that pupils were stretched to perform well. Any available time was study time with the clear aim of performing well in exams. This 'robotic' like treatment does not allow pupils time to be children and grow up interacting with the environment. It emerged also from the interviews and observation that pupils were not quite enthusiastic to go home after a tiring day. They viewed home as a continuation of school life only that this time they were under the supervision of their parents or guardians. Some parents (65 per cent) affirmed that their children appeared fatigued and stressed. The pupils stated that they looked forward to the day the primary cycle would end.

## Conclusions and Recommendations

On the basis of the findings of the study, the following conclusions can be drawn. Foremost most private primary schools put a lot of emphasis on student academic achievement as opposed to other spheres of their life. This makes it appear on the surface level that private primary schools offer quality education (Most of these schools also they have sufficient resources and facilities and they post good results). The education lays a lot of emphasis on what pupils attain in the national exams. Such an education may be deceptive and lopsided and impacted negatively on quality as envisaged. However, the quality of this education needs to be interrogated in light of its emphasis on the mean scores achieved and how this impacts on the pupils.

The study also concluded that the methods used by the private primary schools are unorthodox.

Rote learning is an approach used in the acquisition of basic skills. Such a method does not equip the learners with critical thinking skills to be able to face the present day challenges.

The study recommends that the Ministry of Education should put in place proper structures to ensure that quality in education is not compromised by the allure of good grades. Provision of quality education is the only way that the Kenyan child can be adequately prepared to contribute to societal transformation. Further, the ministry should ensure that holistic approach to learning is adopted if quality education has to retain its meaning.

The study further recommends that teaching should also be focused on acquisition of problem solving skills to enable the pupils adequately confront challenges they are likely to come across as they transit to higher levels of learning. This is in line with recommendations made by Cheserek and Mugalavai (2012):

*“For Kenya to be internationally competitive and economically viable, the Republic of Kenya requires an education system that will produce citizens who are able to engage in lifelong learning, learn new skills quickly, perform more non – routine tasks, capable of more complex problem-solving, take more decisions, understand more about what they are working on, require less supervision, assume more responsibility, have more vital tools, have better reading culture, quantitative analysis, reasoning and expository skills” (Cheserek and Mugalavai, 2012, 472).*

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