

PARTNERSHIP IN SECONDARY SCHOOL ASSESSMENT EXAMINATIONS AND KENYA CERTIFICATE OF SECONDARY EDUCATION EXAMINATIONS: DILEMMA IN EVALUATION

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ABSTRACT

This paper presents the results of a research that investigated the difference in performance between partnerships in secondary school assessment examinations and the Kenya Certificate of Secondary examinations (KCSE) among selected Secondary Schools in the Western region of Kenya. These exams have been very prevalent in Western Kenya Secondary Schools as a way of preparing form four students for KCSE. This high prevalence made it necessary for this research to be carried out to establish the nature of their relationship with KCSE performance. The study focused on six schools in the Western region of Kenya that were engaged in partnership assessments. The study was descriptive in nature and the intra-national case study research design was used with a focus on secondary schools in western region. Purposive sampling was used to select the six secondary schools. Document Analysis was done on past records such as scores in partnership exams and the Kenya Certificate of Secondary Examination Scores. The data collected was analyzed using a mixed method. Descriptive statistics such as percentages, means and T-test were used to establish whether there was any significant difference between partnership exams and K.C.S.E performance. The study found out that there was a significant difference in performance between partnership exams and KCSE in selected schools in western region. The study recommended partnership examinations as a way of preparing candidates for KCSE.

Keywords: Partnership exams, Kenya certificate of Secondary Examination, Secondary schools, Western region.

INTRODUCTION

Education is a key element to any progressive human society. Secondary education has to address the urgent need of expansion and challenges posed by rapid changes occurring in the society and the world of work (UNESCO-ACEID 2010). Secondary school education produces the final product ready for placement into relevant areas of skills needed in the job market. Thus it is a defining moment in the education system. It was in the light of this that the Education for All conference held at Jomtien in Thailand in 1990 decided to universalize access and promote equity in education by envisaging secondary education as part of basic education (UNESCO 1990). The world declaration on education for all regardless of age, sex, location, ethnicity or physical ability was adopted. This stressed that education is one of the fundamental human rights. This call was further reinforced by the millennium development goal number two, which emphasized universal education for all aged between 15-24 by the year 2015 (UNESCO 2005). Many countries of the world have been in a rush to make the aspirations practical.

In many countries there exist limited opportunities for all the individuals in the education system to be absorbed into institutions of further education. (Geaney and Kellaghan 1995). This necessitates making of choices on who should be considered for further education.

These choices require clear machinery upon which to make such decisions. In education, testing is the main method that provides evidence of the level of learning upon which such decisions can be made (Payne 1992). It is in the light of this that examinations are used to make such vital decision.

In Kenya the years 1960, 1961 and 1963 saw an upsurge in the demand for educated Africans to take up jobs that were being left by the colonial administration. Access to education and passing of a Cambridge school certificate became a passionate longing in the hearts of thousands of Africans. The anxieties of teachers and students over examination results had profound effects on secondary school education. A keen adherence to the syllabus and revising of old examinations papers became familiar (Stabler 1969). Since colonial times Kenya like most countries of the world has laid much emphasis on examinations.

At independence Kenya saw the need to have a standard examination as a selection process and therefore teamed up with Uganda and Tanzania to form a common exam body The East African Examinations Council(EAEC) in 1967 (Shiundu and Omulando 1992). As well the EAEC examinations were set by panels of subject specialist and not single individuals. Groups of teachers came together to form setting panels. After the breakup of the East African community the Kenya National Examination Council (KNEC) was created by an act of parliament in 1980. The Kenya national examination council Act constituted chapter 225A of the laws of Kenya and formed the basis for the conduct of public examinations in the country (Shiundu and Omulando 1992). KNEC was formed to replace the East African Examinations Council (EAEC) with its main aim being summative evaluation within the formal education system in Kenya with an exception of university education (ibid). The examinations are set centrally by panels constituting teachers from all over the country. This is meant to achieve standardization and avoid any biasness. KNEC hires teachers to administer, mark at a central point then results are released ranking all students in the country.

National examinations have received more emphasis than internal examinations (Mwangi and Ouko 2004). Indeed one of the major criticisms pointed out in the Master Plan on Education and Training (1997-2010) was that the curriculum implementation process was too dominated by the Kenya Certificate of Secondary Education examinations until most schools concentrated only on the KCSE examinations, doing anything they thought would improve the results (Republic of Kenya 1998). A good school is not only looked at in terms of policies, practices or programs but how well does a school perform relative to other schools within similar compositions and social economic context. The struggle is not to impart skills and knowledge but to produce good K.C.S.E results (Chepkirui 1999).

The increased emphasis on performance in the national examinations saw the rise of schools and regional exams that mocked the national ones. These were meant to prepare students and also predict their KCSE performance (Chepkirui 1999). This practice gave rise to exams that brought together all schools in a district popularly known as District mocks. The examinations were set by individuals appointed by the district academic committee. The examinations were full of biasness, unfairness, below standard and even some students had prior exposure to them. This elicited a lot of hate and fear in the students. In some schools students refused to sit for the exams while in others they went on strike destroying property and lives. This saw the rise of even substandard commercial mock examinations (Mwangi 2006). The situation stirred varied opinions including scrapping of mock exams by a parliamentary committee report in 2008.

As the pressure for good results in KCSE intensified, schools also resorted to buying exams from exam vendors who compiled past papers and even set some, to give to their learners as a way of preparing them for Kenya Certificate of Secondary Education (K.C.S.E). The exams were not necessarily good. As Kigotho (2004) argues that the examination vendors are regarded to have hijacked the teachers' roles and are making a lot of money by providing tests that are not valid and reliable to schools. This has directly replaced the teachers' role of setting examinations according to the content that they have taught in class (Kigotho 2004).

Teachers have to find another way of enhancing their students' performance in the Kenya Certificate of Secondary Education examinations. These efforts have resulted into joint examinations which bring together schools in a District or region just replacing directly the mock exams. In addition the continuous assessment tests (CATS) are still prevalent. They are normally set by teachers at school and done on a monthly basis or at the end of term. Schools in western Kenya have also come up with partnership examinations. This is where two or three schools come together in a given subject to set, administer and mark the exams together. This is meant to remove biasness and create objectivity. They then rank their students and advise them accordingly. This is majorly done to the Form Fours. This has become the trend and many secondary schools in Western Kenya are moving towards partnership in assessment. It was therefore imperative to study these partnership exams and establish their relationship with KCSE performance.

Statement of the Problem

The Kenya Certificate of Secondary Education (KCSE) examinations are used in the selection and placement of students in higher education and in the middle level colleges. In Kenya, this has led to critical emphasis on passing of KCSE using any means possible even if they are dubious. This has also led to the development of various examinations that tend to mock the national examination. Some have been phased out through acts of parliament and ministerial directives but this has not deterred teachers from crafting new types of exams to replace the banned set. However, performance in KCSE varies from one school to another; some schools perform very well and even send almost all students to institutions of higher learning while others perform poorly sending none. Because KCSE is the only stepping stone to success or prosperity in life and a good school is looked at in terms of how well it performs, schools in western region have come together to partner in assessing their students as a way of preparing them for KCSE. The partnership exams have attracted many schools which are coming together with an aim of assessing their students jointly. Thus this study sought to establish whether the performance of student in partnership in secondary school assessment examinations had any difference with KCSE performance.

Objective

The objective of this study was to find out the difference in performance between Partnership in Secondary School Assessment Examinations and performance at the Kenya Certificate of Secondary School Examinations in Western region Secondary Schools.

Research question

The study was guided by the following research question: Was there any significant difference between the performance of students in the Partnership in Secondary School Assessment

Examinations and the Kenya Certificate of Secondary Examination in Western region Secondary Schools?

Methodology

This study was descriptive in design and the intra-national case study method was used. The study used a mixed method to analyze data; as well it was comparative in nature. Descriptive design is a scientific method which involves observing and describing the behavior of a subject in its natural environment without influencing it in any way (Mugenda and Mugenda 2003). The researcher used this method to collect data and analyze on partnership in secondary school assessment and KCSE to establish the nature of the relationship. The data was used to describe the existing conditions in partnership in secondary school assessment. As put by Cohen (2000) the method enables a researcher to gather data at a particular point in time and use it to describe the nature of the existing conditions. The researcher also compared these exams in different schools and used them to establish whether indeed there was any significant difference between partnership in secondary school assessment and KCSE. As argued by Kerlinger (1996) the descriptive studies are not only restricted to fact findings, but may often result in the formulation of important principles of knowledge and solutions to significant problems. The study was designed further to provide insight into the research problem by describing variables of interest. The KCSE performance was the dependent variable while partnership in secondary school assessment was the independent variable.

The study sites included secondary schools in the western region of Kenya where Partnership in Assessment takes place. The schools are found in four counties namely: Bungoma, Busia, Vihiga and Kakamega. The study focused on schools in Busia, Kakamega and Vihiga counties. This area was chosen due to the prevalence of partnership exams such as NYAKAIKA and NYABUTIMU. As well western region has a very big population of approximately 4.334 million and a literacy level of 50.2%. Poverty level in Vihiga County is at 62%, Kakamega 57% and Busia 66%. Their major source of income is farming of sugar cane and maize. This has made them turn to education as their only hope for a better future. Thus most people in western region value and appreciate the importance of education. Equally, Western has quite a number of very big and well performing schools.

Target population and Sampling

There were 697 secondary schools in Western region (MOE 2012). This study focused on schools with a long tradition of good performance, high student population and participation in partnership assessments.

Table 1 Distribution of Secondary schools among Counties in Western region

COUNTY	TOTAL NUMBER OF SCHOOLS	PUBLIC SCHOOLS	PRIVATE SCHOOLS	NUMBER OF SCHOOLS INVOLVED IN PARTNERSHIP EXAMS
Bungoma	168	165	3	19
Kakamega	271	266	5	24
Busia	121	117	4	14
Vihiga	137	134	3	16
TOTAL	697	682	15	73

Source: County Education Office

The researcher used purposive sampling to identify the schools. Given that not all schools took part in partnership exams, only those that were involved were considered. In addition the researcher targeted schools involved in two sets of exams namely NYAKAIKA (Nyang'ori, Kaimosi, and Kakamega) and NYABUTIMU (Nyang'ori, Butula, and Mukumu) because these two sets of partnership had been in existence for a period of over five years. The six schools involved in NYAKAIKA and NYABUTIMU were selected. The sampled schools were as shown in table 2 below.

Table 2 Secondary schools sampled as study sites.

Institution	Teaching staff	Location	Duration in partnership exams
Nyang'ori Boys	53	Vihiga county	6
Kakamega High	74	Kakamega county	8
Mukumu Girls	62	Kakamega county	7
Kaimosi Girls	52	Vihiga county	5
Butula Boys	44	Busia county	5

The schools are located in different counties: Nyang'ori boys and Kaimosi girls are in Vihiga County found on the southern part of Western region, bordering Nandi and Kisumu Counties. Kakamega boys and Mukumu girls are in Kakamega County which is located in the central part of Western region while Butula boys is in Busia county on the eastern of Western region, bordering Siaya, Uganda and Lake victoria.

Document Analysis

The researcher analyzed past records of students in the partnership in secondary school assessment exams (scores) and their performance in KCSE over a period of 5 years (2008, 2009, 2010, 2011, and 2012). These records were obtained from the selected schools. This enabled the researcher to establish if there was any significant difference between KCSE performance and partnership exams. In this case, the results were affected by the participation in partnership exams. The researcher utilized a paired T-test at 0.05 level of significance, 4 degrees of freedom and 2.7764 critical T-value. If the calculated T-value is greater than the critical T-value then it means there is a significant difference. If the calculated T-value is less than the critical T-value then there is no significant difference (Smith 1970).

Findings

The research question this paper sought to answer was: *Was there any significant difference between the performance of students in the Partnership in Secondary School Assessment Exams and KCSE in Western region Secondary Schools?*

The following findings indicate how the schools involved in the partnership examinations compared with their KCSE results in English and business studies. The findings on Nyang'ori English means for both partnership and KCSE are as shown in table 3 below.

TABLE 3: Nyang'ori English means for partnership exams and KCSE 2008-2012

YEAR	NUMBER OF CANDIDATES	PARTNERSHIP EXAM MEAN	KCSE MEAN
2008	151	6.140	7.7748
2009	192	6.605	8.3958
2010	186	7.702	8.8011
2011	208	7.0136	8.3269
2012	219	8.247	9.3562

Source: Director of studies office Nyang'ori high school. **November 2013**

The data indicated that the mean for partnership exams in 2008 was 6.140. It then increased marginally to 6.605 in 2009 then again increased drastically to 7.702 in 2010 and dropped to 7.0136 in 2011 then again increased drastically to 8.247 in 2012. On the other hand, the KCSE mean was at 7.7748 in 2008 then increased to 8.3958 in 2009, 8.8011 in 2010 then dropped to 8.3269 in 2011 and shot up to 9.3562 in 2012. The calculated t-value was 9.951 and the critical value at 0.05 level of significance and 4df was 2.7764. The calculated t-value was higher than the critical t-value. Therefore, we can conclude that there was a significant difference in English performance between partnership exams and KCSE in Nyang'ori English over the study period.

The findings on Kaimosi secondary school English performance in partnership and KCSE exams are as shown in table 4 below.

TABLE 4: Kaimosi English means for partnership exams and KCSE 2008-2012

YEAR	NUMBER OF CANDIDATES	PARTNERSHIP EXAM MEAN	KCSE MEAN
2008	240	6.023	7.07
2009	253	5.904	8.27
2010	210	7.777	8.75
2011	233	6.984	8.45
2012	249	8.021	9.08

Source: Head of English Department Kaimosi Girls. **November 2013**

The mean for partnership exams in 2008 was at 6.023 then a decrease to 5.904 in 2009, an improvement to 7.777 in 2010 then a drop to 6.984 in 2011 and then again a drastic improvement to 8.021 in 2012. In KCSE the mean was at 7.07 in 2008 then an increase to 8.27 in 2009, 8.75 in 2010, a slight drop to 8.45 in 2011 then an improvement to 9.08 in 2012. The calculated t-value was 5.3022 and the critical t-value at 0.05 significance level and 4df was 2.7764. The calculated t-value was higher than the critical t-value. Therefore, the conclusion is that there was a significant difference between performance in partnership exams and KCSE in English in Kaimosi secondary school.

A similar analysis was done with English performance in Kakamega and the results are summarized in table 5 below.

TABLE 5: Kakamega English means for partnership and KCSE exams 2008-2012

YEAR	NUMBER OF CANDIDATES	PARTNERSHIP EXAM MEAN	KCSE MEAN
2008	253	5.872	8.231
2009	244	6.327	8.600
2010	269	7.028	8.71
2011	277	6.106	8.50
2012	305	7.805	8.70

Source: Director of studies office Kakamega high school. **November 2013**

The mean for English in Kakamega high for partnership exam was at 5.872 in 2008 then increased to 6.327 in 2009, 7.028 in 2010 and a drop to 6.106 in 2011 then an improvement to 7.805 in 2012. In KCSE the mean for 2008 was 8.231 then increased to 8.600 in 2009, 8.71 in 2010 and slightly decreased to 8.50 in 2011 then an improvement to 8.70 in 2012. The calculated t-value was 6.6881 while the critical t-value at 0.05 significance level and 4df was 2.7764. From the t-test the calculated t-value was higher than the critical t-value. Therefore, the conclusion is that there was a significant difference between KCSE and partnership exams performance in English in Kakamega high school.

The other partnership exam was NYABUTIMU which brought together three schools that is Nyang'ori, Butula and Mukumu in Business studies. The findings on Nyang'ori Business Studies are as shown in table 6 below.

TABLE 6: Nyang'ori Business studies means for partnership exams and KCSE 2008-2012

YEAR	NUMBER OF STUDENTS	PARTNERSHIP EXAMS MEAN	KCSE MEAN
2008	80	8.0131	8.5125
2009	120	7.010	8.8250
2010	92	8.246	9.4674
2011	101	6.8007	9.7030
2012	81	7.651	8.9136

Source: Director of Studies office Nyang'ori high school. **November 2013**

The findings as summarized in table 6 show that the mean for Business studies in partnership exam in Nyang'ori in 2008 was 8.0131 then a decrease to 7.010 in 2009, a drastic increase to 8.246 in 2010 then a drop again to 6.8007 in 2011 and a slight improvement to 7.651 in 2012. In KCSE the mean for 2008 was 8.5125 then an increase to 8.8250 in 2009, further increase again to 9.4674 in 2010, 9.7030 in 2011 and a decrease to 8.9136 in 2012. The calculated t-value was 3.8547, while the critical t-value at 0.05 significance level and 4df is 2.7764. The calculated t-value is higher than the critical t-value. Therefore, in Nyang'ori High School there was a significant difference between partnership in business exams and KCSE performance.

The analyses on Butula Boys' Business studies are presented in table 7 below.

TABLE 7: Butula Business studies means for partnership exams and KCSE 2008-2012

YEAR	NUMBER OF CANDIDATES	PARTNERSHIP EXAMS MEANS	KCSE MEAN
2008	115	8.467	10.23
2009	112	6.921	8.69
2010	114	8.0174	8.669
2011	94	6.8041	9.9569
2012	91	7.953	9.598

Source: Senior Head of Department Industrials Butula Boys. **November 2013**

The partnership exams mean was 8.467 in 2008, decreased significantly to 6.921 in 2009, and then a drastic increased to 8.0174 in 2010 and a further drastic drop again to 6.8041 in 2011. This was followed by a minimal increase to 7.953 in 2012. On the other hand, the KCSE mean was very high in 2008 at 10.23 then dropped slightly to 8.69 in 2009, remained at 8.669 in 2010 and then increased again to 9.9569 in 2011 and a minimal decrease to 9.598 in 2012. The calculated t-value was 4.5082. The critical t-value at 0.05 level of significance and 4df was 2.7764. The calculated t-value was higher than the critical t-value. Thus the conclusion is that there was a significant difference in performance between partnership exams and KCSE in Business studies in Butula Boys' High School.

The results for Mukumu Business Studies for both partnership and KCSE examinations are as shown in table 8 below.

TABLE 8: Mukumu Business studies means for partnership exams and KCSE 2008-2012

YEAR	NUMBER OF CANDIDATES	PARTNERSHIP EXAMS MEAN	KCSE MEAN
2008	51	7.143	7.37
2009	41	6.937	8.805
2010	61	7.979	8.32
2011	83	7.053	7.361
2012	52	7.182	7.340

Source: Director of studies office Mukumu Girls. **November 2013**

The mean for partnership exam in 2008 was 7.143 which then decreased slightly to 6.937 in 2009. It increased significantly to 7.979 in 2010 followed by a significant decrease to 7.053 in 2011 and a slight improvement to 7.182 in 2012. On the other hand, the KCSE mean for business studies in 2008 was 7.37, then slightly increased to 8.805 in 2009 and decreased slightly to 8.32 in 2010, then a further decrease to 7.361 in 2011 and 7.340 in 2012. The calculated t-value was 1.7385 and the critical t-value at 0.05 level of significance and 4df was 2.7764. The calculated t-value was lower than the critical t-value. Therefore the conclusion is that there was no significant difference between performance in partnership exams and KCSE in Business studies in Mukumu High School.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

From the above analysis it is clear that there is a significant difference in performance between partnership exams and KCSE in secondary schools in western region. Five out of the six selected schools performed better in KCSE than in the partnership exams. Over a period of five years; 2008-2012 there was always a variation in each year in the means of

partnership exams and KCSE. In each case the KCSE mean was always higher than the partnership exam.

In Nyang'ori high school the means of English each year were higher in KCSE as compared to partnership exams. For instance in 2008 the partnership mean was 6.140 while KCSE 7.7748 a difference of +1.6348. The same applies to the other four years. As well the KCSE mean kept on improving from 7.7748 in 2008 to 9.3562 in 2012. With t-test the calculated t-value was higher than the critical t-value thus calculated t-value 9.951 and critical t-value was at 2.7764. This is a clear indication that partnership exams contributed to good performance in KCSE.

The performance in Kaimosi English indicated the same trend. The performance in partnership exams has remained all times lower than the KCSE one. The mean difference in the two exams has ranged between +2.366 on the higher side to +1.047 on the lower side. There is no time these means have been the same. When t-test is used the calculated t-value was higher than the critical t-value. This indicates that there is a significant difference. Although in comparison to Nyang'ori English the significant difference seems lower. However, it is clear that in Kaimosi Girls participation in partnership exams in English contributed to good performance in KCSE.

In addition Kakamega also seems to have benefited through participation in Partnership examinations. For the five years; 2008 to 2012 the means of KCSE have been higher as compared to partnership exams although with disparities. However, each year students have performed better in KCSE than in partnership exams. Using t-test the calculated t-value was at 6.6881 while the critical t-value at 2.7764. There is a significant difference between the two exams. This implies that partnership examinations contributed to good KCSE performance because they were used as a way of preparing the form four candidates.

On the other hand, the partnership exams that brought together Nyang'ori, Mukumu and Butula in Business Studies seemed to have a significant difference except for Mukumu. In Nyang'ori the performance in Business studies is higher in KCSE than partnership examinations. Students who took part in partnership exams performed better at KCSE. For example the mean in 2010 for partnership was at 8.246 while at KCSE 9.4674 a difference of +1.2214. With t-test the calculated t-value was 3.8547 while the critical t-value was 2.7764. This shows that there is a significant difference between performance in KCSE and partnership exams. It is assumed that this difference was caused by the partnership exams.

Equally in Butula Business studies the KCSE mean was higher than the partnership exam mean. Each year although with variations the KCSE mean was higher. The exams are prepared with KCSE in mind the improved mean can be attributed to them. In 2012 for instance the partnership exam mean was at 7.953 while KCSE at 9.598. Therefore participation in these exams gave students the confidence and skills they needed in tackling KCSE.

In reference to the above five schools it is clear that there is a significant difference between partnership examinations and KCSE. The partnership examinations have each year contributed to a higher mean in KCSE. This may be attributed to the emphasis and value attached to the partnership exams by the teachers and students. They seem to have a positive attitude and willing to engage in them. These exams are also well prepared because they bring together people with varied experiences and together they set more standard exams,

compete amongst themselves and become better prepared for KCSE. The setting, marking and administration of these exams are a replica of KCSE. They also give students a chance to revise and build confidence in preparation for KCSE.

On the contrary, the partnership examinations seemed not to benefit Mukumu Girls in Business Studies. In some years the partnership examinations mean was almost equivalent to KCSE. Thus 2008 partnership mean 7.143 while KCSE 7.37, in 2011 partnership mean 7.053 and KCSE 7.361 and 2012 partnership exam 7.182 while KCSE 7.340. Using t-test the calculated t-value was 1.7361 while the critical t-value was 2.7764. Therefore the calculated t-value was lower than the critical t-value indication that there was no significant difference between partnership examinations and KCSE. This range can be interpreted to mean that the exams set by the teachers through partnership were reliable as a measure of what would be expected in the final KCSE examination. On the other hand the partnership exams in Mukumu Business Studies can be taken as not contributing to good KCSE performance therefore a mere waste of time and resources.

The scenario in Mukumu Business Studies can be attributed to a number of issues. Firstly, the attitude of the teachers and students is to blame. Maybe the teachers and students are not interested in the exams and so they do not take them seriously thus not benefiting from them. As well the school administrators may take part of the blame because they are expected to facilitate and provide guidance. But if they do not do so then the exams are bound to fail in achieving their purpose. Equally an exam is only of value if it is well set, administered, marked and revised. However if one of these is not done then the purpose may not be achieved. Therefore the failure by partnership exams in Mukumu to yield positive results is an indication that just like any other exam, partnership exams must be well managed to obtain maximum benefits.

CONCLUSION

It is clear that most of the schools taking part in partnership exams had their KCSE means improve. Each year the KCSE mean was higher than the partnership exams mean. Therefore, we can conclude that partnership examinations were good in preparing candidates for KCSE because they contributed to an improvement of the subject mean. This can only be possible if each of the partner schools took the exam seriously, set them well, administer, mark and revise in good time. The school administrators must also support the process both financially and in guidance. The students and teachers must be receptive and cooperative. Failure to factor in the above issues may result to the Mukumu scenario where the examinations are a waste of time and may not result into any meaningful benefit to the candidates. So as people rash to embrace the partnership examinations caution should be taken to avoid them resulting into a waste of time and resources.

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