

# Education Access and Retention for Street Children: Perspectives from Kenya

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## Abstract

Human beings and specifically in African societies value children for they determine the communities' future and place them at the centre of their family life. Over the decades, governments have recognized the importance of children in their development efforts and have devoted considerable resources to child development especially in education and health. In Kenya, Free Primary Education (FPE) led to significant increase in primary school enrolment. Among the children who were enrolled in school were Street children but many more children are once again on the streets. Such children end up roaming the streets, deficient of adult supervision and engage in activities majorly to themselves and the society. The major objective of the study on which this paper is based was to determine the learning needs of street children in Kenya. A survey research design was adopted for the study. The study was conducted in Nairobi County targeting 320 street children living in the streets and those found in rehabilitation centres. A total of 33 street children and 20 in rehabilitation centres were sampled and studied. It was established that quality accelerated education delivered through a relevant curriculum would enable such children lead a decent life and contribute to national development. An appropriate curriculum was recommended for this special category of learners.

**Keywords:** Street Children, Curriculum, Education, Access and Retention

## Introduction

Education is recognized globally, not only as the foundation for lifelong learning and human development, but also as an essential ingredient in the fight to reduce poverty and promote development in all aspects of life (Kimuyu et al, 1999). Kenya like many other countries relies on education in the aspiration to scale up the economy and provide high quality life to all her citizens by the year 2030 (Kenya, Republic of, 2008). Schultz (1981) contends that population quality and knowledge constitute the principal determinants of the future welfare of mankind. Education steers development in all spheres of life. At the individual level, a child who has access to quality primary schooling has a better chance in life as the education provides the child a solid foundation for continued learning throughout life and also equips the child with skills to lead a productive life in society.

At independence, the Government of Kenya recognized that education was the basic tool for human resources development, improving the quality of life and cultivating nationalistic values (Kenya, Republic of, 2008). This led the government to prioritise the provision of education and, as stated in its planning documents, the country's aims for education are among others the expansion of educational opportunities and Universal primary education (Eshiwani, 1990). Education is seen as the primary means of social mobility, national cohesion and socio-economic development. The government, since independence has encouraged the rapid expansion of education. In 1974, primary education was made free in the lower primary school classes (Standard One to Four) and thereafter made progressively free until 1979, when it became all free and universal (Eshiwani, 1993). However, following the implementation of the Structural Adjustment Plans in the 1980's introduction of cost sharing measures led to payment of user fees in exchange for services in health and educational institutions and programmes of Education, health and nutrition deteriorated (Van Der Geest, 1994). This led to a drop in enrolment and in the years that followed the enrolment continued to decline for several reasons that included the expenses the parents bore and the result was the low quality of education being delivered in the country's schools (UNICEF, 2009). The first casualties in such an arrangement are usually the Orphaned and Vulnerable Children. When the NARC Government took over the country's leadership in 2002, the re - introduction of free primary education led to massive enrolment in the countries' public primary schools. Many of the newly enrolled pupils were found to be OVCs, notably the street children.

## Vulnerable Children and Education in Kenya

The Kenyan Government is a signatory to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (Kenya, Republic of, 2001). Kenya was also represented in the 1990 Jomtien Education for All Conference (EFA) in which a declaration committing governments to develop quality basic education for all was passed. In order to

domesticate and implement the resolutions of these, among other international frameworks, the country formulated and adopted the Children's Act (2001). The Act re-affirms education as the foremost basic right of children in Kenya.

In addition, the Incheon 2015 conference advocated for 12 years primary and secondary public paid education and two of the Millennium Development Goals (MDG's) had advocated for the eradication of extreme poverty and hunger and provision of free primary education which cannot be achieved when some members of the society are not in school. In its long term development blue print, the Kenya Vision 2030, the country aspires to attain the status of a cohesive and prosperous nation. To cater for Special categories of children, the Vision, in its Social Pillar outlines the strategies to be adopted to enhance access and retention of vulnerable children in the education cycle (Kenya, Republic of, 2007). To guide the implementation of the Vision 2030 development blue print, a national plan of action was formulated and most of its strategies have been mainstreamed and infused in the education sector planning documents. The Kenya Education Sector Support Programme 2005-210 (MOEST, 2005) clearly indicated the government's commitment in education of the children.

### **Street Children Phenomenon in Kenya**

Street children are vulnerable and a phenomenon that is heart breaking. If not well handled, they may join a country's enemies and cause havoc. Currently, Nairobi city and other urban centres in Kenya face the challenge of groups of children lazily loitering the streets. Some of them have grown into adults, a situation which has resulted into the emergence of street families. The street children phenomenon is indeed one of the most depressing challenges of our time (UNICEF, 1998). Shorter and Onyanha (1999) reported that the number of street children in Nairobi increased from 3,600 in 1989 to 40, 000 in 1997. Currently, the Department for Children Services places the figure at between 60,000 and 80,000. Even after the declaration of Free Primary Education by the Kenyan government in January, 2003, the menace's challenge has still persisted. This has mainly been attributed to the failure to address the specific and unique learning needs of this category of children (Kisirkoi, 2012). Studies have revealed that it is difficult for street children to enroll and remain in learning centres and schools (KIE, 1995; Thomson, 2001) as most of them drop out of the centres and return to the streets because of reasons that include their great value of excessive independence. According to WERK (2002) there is a positive correlation between children on the streets and their home background.

Most parents of street children are engaged in petty trade, brewing of illicit alcoholic drinks, begging and manual labour. Hence, poverty is a major factor in leading children into the streets in Kenya. Other factors associated with children getting into the street include; domestic conflicts, orphan hood, alcoholic parents, failure by parents to show love to their children, abandonment due to disability and verbal and physical abuse by parents and teachers. To curb further proliferation of street children in the country, the answer lies in tackling the underlying causes while solutions should be found out to enable those already in the streets to revert to normal functioning and engage in productive activities in society. Vigil (2002) argued that the children need to be enabled to build self-confidence and the sense of self-worth that has been steadily diminished by years of hardship. More importantly, an investigation into their learning needs could enable the provision of a curriculum, which could bridge the established gap caused by their unique life experiences which hinder their sustenance in school as compared to that of other children.

### **Purpose and Objectives of the Study**

The main purpose of the study on which this paper is based was to investigate the learning needs of street children in Kenya in general, and specifically those in Nairobi and the implications of the needs for the curriculum for use in provision of education to vulnerable children. The identification of the needs would spell out an appropriate curriculum for the children that would lead to retention of the learners in the institutions, hence result in their gainful learning and decent livelihoods in future. The study was guided by the Ralph Tyler (1949) model of curriculum development process. It identified needs identification in a curriculum development process as the basis of curriculum development and this study specifically focused on identification of learning needs of street children in order to explore the curriculum implication of the needs. The specific objectives of the study were to:

- a) Investigate factors that led children to the streets
- b) Determine the learning needs of street children in Kenya
- c) Recommend strategies for enhancing access and retention of vulnerable children in school

### **Materials and Methods**

The study upon which this paper is based was conducted in Nairobi County, specifically within the Nairobi Central Business District. A survey research design was employed. It involved assessing attitudes and opinions of the respondents towards the various facets of the phenomena under investigation. This approach was the most

appropriate as it allowed street children to freely discuss issues affecting their lives and in the process their emotions and attitudes were observed and recorded (Gay, 2009).

The target population was all street children aged between 6 and 18 years. It is not easy to get the exact number of street children because the same children roam different streets. The age bracket was adopted because it is the formal school going age. The study targeted an estimated population of 320 street children from Nairobi Central Business District aged between 6 – 18 years as follows: Kibanyu 170 street children and from Tom Mboya street, Kenyatta Avenue, Aga Khan Walk 150 street children. A study sample of 53 street children was selected, including children rescued from the streets and undergoing rehabilitation and learning in centres such as Made from the Streets, Creative Learning Centre, Mary Immaculate Children's Centre and Rescue Dada. Apart from the children in these centres, the centre managers were also interviewed. Data gathered from the former street children in the rehabilitation centres was used to triangulate information given by street children who were still on the streets and those from Kibanyu. The centre managers and teachers gave their views regarding curriculum for street children and what they felt would be the appropriate learning approaches for this category of learners. The social workers gave information regarding the kind of life led by street children and the kind of families they came from. Key informants were drawn from Kenya Institute of Curriculum Development, County Education Department, Ministry of Education and the Children's Department.

### **Factors that Lead the Children to the Streets in Kenya**

A multiplicity of factors leads the children to the streets. The study findings revealed that out of the 53 children interviewed the reason for leaving home was as follows: Lack of food/ money (poverty) 14(27%), Parent's separation and domestic violence 7(13.3%) Boredom, adventure and peer influence 13(25%), Parents negligence 16(30%), Born on the streets 1 (2.3%), Harsh teachers 1(2.3%). Parents negligence with 16(30%) played the greatest role in sending children to the streets

### **Life Aspirations of Street Children Learning in the Centres**

The interviewed street children reported that they were ready to take part in all learning activities which would help them earn a living and fulfill their life aspirations. They would like to acquire skills, which would lead to employment. They asserted that they would like to join professions such as medicine, mechanical engineering, architecture, teaching and law. Former street children who were now in the learning centres reported that they enjoyed learning English, Kiswahili, Science, Christian Religious Education, Geography, History and Civics, Agriculture, Home Science and practical subjects such as; Woodwork, Art and Craft. They also aspire to become doctors, engineers, teachers, mechanics, bankers and computer engineers. They would like to live in up-market estates like Muthaiga, Runda, and Westlands and bring up happy children taken to and from schools by cars.

Different learning centres offered different curricula. Some of them taught; Dental Hygiene, Basic Hygiene, Religious Education, Environmental Science, positive behaviour management and discipline without caning. Simple Arithmetic, English, Kiswahili and Religious Education were part of some other centres' curriculum. Music, Drama, Art and Craft, Sports and Games were enjoyed by street children in the learning centres. Other centres offered hair dressing, dress-making, housekeeping, masonry, knitting, crocheting, sewing, and weaving, while others offered English, Mathematics, Kiswahili and Guidance and Counseling. Many centres offered Cookery, Carpentry, Welding, Business Education, Agriculture, Auto Mechanics, Tailoring, Metalwork and Apprenticeship. All centres offered games and sports which children enjoyed playing. They were also taught dangers of HIV/ Aids and Drug Abuse.

Education professionals recommended that street children should be enabled to acquire and develop desired knowledge skills and attitudes. There was need for identification of individual talents of each child. Centre managers and teachers reported that they had identified skills in street children such as modeling, acrobatics, art, music and weaving. They proposed that academic subjects, trade skills, and support subjects were all needed to equip the street children with necessary skills which would enable them to join the labour market. They also reported they had observed great potential in street children and that the children would benefit most from practical oriented subjects and basic literacy rather than too much academics. This was in agreement with Mwangi (2001), who proposed basic literacy and source of livelihoods as part of non- formal education curriculum. The centre managers and teachers also proposed that, in order for street children to learn, they had to be enabled to access food, shelter and clothing through well organized and focused programmes with government support. Sports and games were reported to be very important for the street children because they helped them to forget negative memories and focus on developing their talents instead of abusing drugs. The learning centres aimed at helping street children acquire self- value, self esteem and a positive self- image after the damage by street life. Few children were rehabilitated in the centres and then taken to formal schools.

Active learning method were used in Creative Learning Centre and Made from the Streets. Learners actively participated in their own learning. Lecture method was discouraged. Positive behaviour management was the backbone of teaching and learning in some learning centres. In Creative Learning Centre, there was

emphasis on making learning fun. In Made from the Streets, Kamulu rehabilitation centre, children planted and tended crops. They also participated in building houses.

The children said that they liked teachers who were patient, caring, who did not shout at them when they made mistakes, who knew the content and were good in teaching; who punished them justly and who were ready to understand their problems. Majority of the children preferred lady teachers to male teachers. They liked polite teachers who would not hurt them physically or psychologically; teachers who were committed and would play with them freely.

Interviewed street children said that they would like to obey school rules and be justly punished but they did not want corporal punishment. All interviewed children showed distaste for approved schools because of their tough disciplinary measures. However, they did not mind any mode of punishment which would not inflict pain on them.

### **Street Children's Attitude Towards their Learning Centres**

When asked about what they liked about their learning centres, the children in the centres said that they liked order and discipline in the centre, food, free choice of games, and creativity in learning, prayers, and opportunity to socialize with one another, their manager, teachers and social workers. All the children looked very happy.

### **Contribution of Street Children to Self and Society**

Most of the interviewed professionals, centre managers and teachers said that if street children were provided with proper education, majority of them would serve themselves and the society just like any other children would do when provided with relevant quality education.

### **Development Needed in the Centres**

Capacity building of the teachers and managers of non- formal learning centres on skills or reflective teaching, multi- grade teaching approaches and active learning methods were identified as needs of the centre teachers and managers. Teaching-learning resources and relevant curriculum were also cited as needs by the centres.

From this study, it was clear that street children had learning needs which were similar to those of other children. Rescued street children, in the learning centres were aware of the demands of the society and had aspirations similar to those of any child. Some of them aspired to become doctors, managers, teachers, mechanics, drivers, bankers and computer engineers. They wished to bring up happy families and live in good environments. Street children like any other children craved for love, affection and acceptance. However, street children had unique life experiences. The harsh life experiences and environment dictated that the approach to their teaching and learning at the initial stages, take a different course from that of other children. Learning needs of street children, just like learning needs of any other children were identified as: desired knowledge, skills and attitudes which should be built on a foundation of provided social basic needs which include: food, shelter, love and acceptance.

### **Education Access and Retention for Street Children**

Studies by KIE (1995) now KICD and Thompson (2001) reveal that street children highly value excessive freedom and most of them dropped out of formal education schools and joined non-formal education centres where there are less restrictions but eventually dropped out too. The study also revealed that the street children frequented Kibanyu- a deserted incomplete building in Nairobi city where they accessed excess freedom and lived without adult supervision and exercised freedom to engage in antisocial activities including stealing and freely sniffing glue. When the researchers visited Kibanyu, they found it in deplorable condition, littered with human waste and children lived in the filth and there were no covering clothes, doors or windows to be closed.

Some of the children who had been rescued from the streets by the government following the introduction of free primary education programme, returned to the streets even at the time of the survey. Street children are back in Nairobi city in large numbers to date, 2015. This implies that although this special category of vulnerable children had been included to benefit from the government's free education policy, their specific learning needs were not appropriately addressed. They were just enrolled in schools together with other children who live normal lives in the protection of adults. A large number of street children require to be enabled to acquire desired knowledge, skills and attitudes to engage in productive activities in society. Teachers also needed to be sensitized on the special needs of street children and to be re-trained on strategies of active teaching/learning strategies and on creating a learner friendly environment for all children so that no child would ever be made to go to the streets by harsh teachers and unfriendly school environment.

### **Quality Accelerated Education through a Relevant Curriculum**

Curriculum and education cannot be separated. Curriculum indicates what should be learnt and taught, why it should be learnt and taught and how to facilitate learning (Posner et al, 1972). In Kenya the recognition that

despite the implementation of the FPE initiative, nearly 1 Million children and youth, among them, street children are unable to access education through formal delivery channels, has led the government to advocate for alternative basic education (Kenya, Republic of, 2009). To influence girls' enrolment and retention among Vulnerable Children, UNICEF (2012) advocates for the adoption of accelerated learning programmes comprising Community-based classes provided for a range of vulnerable children who encounter barriers to education in mainstream schools.

### **Recommendations**

It is imperative that the government should provide suitable education to all its citizens to equip everybody with skills for life to enable them meet their own needs and participate in national development as productive members of society. Anybody offering education for street children should address pertinent issues regarding their unique life experiences before effective learning can take place. Their learning needs should be identified first and the gaps addressed. The needs should then be met, through an appropriate curriculum which should be channeled to changing their current behavior towards the desired direction and also enabling them to acquire the desired knowledge, skills and attitudes. In addition, appropriate teaching/learning materials should be provided to cater for a conducive learning environment.

#### **(a) Model Curriculum Design for Street Children in Kenya**

Hawes (1982) argues that no society can escape the responsibility of planning the education of the children who grow up in it. This paper recommends development and implementation of a suitable curriculum for this category of vulnerable children. The curriculum should be flexible enough to take a non-formal perspective that allows entry to formal school system and addresses the learners' needs for livelihoods. It recommends that all street children should be interviewed first to identify their varied categories as regards their health status, family links and to find out the level of psycho-social damage street life has had on each of them. Each case should be treated individually.

#### **(b) Non- Formal Education for Street Children**

A large number of street children may not immediately adjust well in formal schools. They may have to learn in non-formal centres.

Following the findings of the study, it is recommended that non-formal education should be structured to offer education to different ages and abilities of street children. Some children may not fit in classes where their mental ability compared to their age place them. For example, Kithure in the East African Standard January, 22, 2003, reported street children's views about school where Kariuki aged 17, said that at his age he would be ashamed to sit with young children in class. He pleaded with the government to consider another option for grown-up children. In view of sentiments such as Kariuki's this study recommended that non-formal education should have 2 structures each consisting 3 phases as follows:

##### **(i) First Structure**

###### **Phase 1: Rehabilitation**

Rehabilitation of all street children should be carried out. The rehabilitation course should include: hygiene, games, sports, athletics, drama, basic numeracy and literacy, skills development, life skills, living values acquisition, drug abuse and HIV/Aids messages and religious education. The length of this phase should depend on the learners/needs. As long as a child can adjust to a learning atmosphere he or she should be moved to the next stage where they should be prepared for academic and trade skills developments.

###### **Phase 2: Basic - Further Non Formal Education (NFE) Linked to Formal Education (FE) for children aged (6-9 years)**

These children should be prepared to lead self sustaining and fulfilling lives. The curriculum should be closely related to that offered in formal school standards 1-4. The teacher should keep comparing the children academic ability with that of children in formal school to help them join formal schools when they are ready and willing to join them. The children's other abilities should be identified for example, in skills such as; hair dressing, carpentry, weaving, dressmaking, athletics, sports and others. This phase should not take more than 2 years. After completing 2 years, learners who will be ready to join formal primary school standard five should be allowed to do so. Rehabilitation, guidance and counseling should continue. Those not ready should be prepared for NFE.

###### **Phase 3: Further Non Formal Education Linked to Formal Education (10-14yrs).**

The children at this phase should be offered curriculum closely related to that of children in their age bracket in formal schools. At the same time, the identified trade skills abilities in lower phases should be further developed. Trade skills should be included in their curriculum. The children should be prepared for further academic education and self-reliance by the time they complete phase 3. The phase should take 2 years. At the end of the course, learners who are able could sit the Kenya Certificate of Primary Education (KCPE). Those who qualify could proceed to formal secondary schools. On the other hand, those who may not qualify should be prepared to continue with further trade skills development and occupations. Rehabilitation and guidance and counseling

sessions should continue.

### **(ii) Second Structure**

The second structure of NFE should be offered to street children who are identified when they are already past formal schools joining age of six years and they are not interested in academic education. It may also include learners from the first structure who could not join Formal Education and were also in skills development. This category of street children should be identified between ages 8-18 years. The ages may not be distinctively defined. Their being in phases 1, 2 or 3 should depend of their skills or and academic ability. There should be flexibility as regards age and phase of learning. An accelerated curriculum should be designed for over age talented learners to cater for sentiments such as those which had been raised by Kariuki. They do not need to be retained in school or trade institutions if they are fast learners.

#### **Phase One of Second Structure: Rehabilitation**

The children/youth should be rehabilitated. Games, sports, athletics, drama, hygiene, Kiswahili, English, mathematics, religious education, life skills, living values, drug abuse, and HIV/Aids awareness should be part of their curriculum. It should take 2-12 months depending on needs of learners.

#### **Phase 2: Skills Exploration**

After the children's psycho- social status is corrected the centres should concentrate on identifying their talents. The centres should provide opportunity for the children to explore their talents in trade skills and other areas of children's interest. They should be offered opportunity to develop their different skills. At the same time the lessons provided for rehabilitation should continue at advanced levels. The following subjects could still be offered: games, athletics, drama, mathematics, Kiswahili, English, life skills, living values, Drug abuse and HIV/Aids awareness. The subjects offered should enable them to explore their skills for further development. This phase should take one- two years depending on the learners' ability.

#### **Phase 3: Skills Development**

The trade skills should be practiced in the form of apprenticeship. The children should be provided with opportunity to practise skills acquired in the previous levels. Their products could be sold and the children given a little honorarium. They should be trained in financial planning. Games, sports and drama should continue. Knowledge acquired in life skills, living values, drug abuse and HIV/Aids awareness should be used by the children to sensitize the community of the learnt issues. This phase should also take one year but depending on the learners' ability, this time should be reduced or increased. Lessons in mathematics, English, and Kiswahili should continue at advanced level to sustain their literacy and numeracy.

### **Conclusion**

Street children are with us and constitute the present and future of the country. The study established that their learning needs were similar to those of children who grow under care, love and protection of their parents. However street children are exposed to difficult environment and living conditions when compared to other children growing up under parental love and care. They engage in all sorts of antisocial behaviour and value enhanced freedom and this could explain their instability in formal school. Education for the street children should therefore address pertinent issues regarding the unique experiences of these children before effective learning can take place. They require a special curriculum that allows for rehabilitation which takes a non formal approach yet allowing entry and re entry to formal schools. It should be flexible and include trade skills for livelihoods.

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