Evaluation Frameworks, Testing and Assessment in Secondary Schools in Kenya

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Abstract – This paper seeks to address the question: What are the existing evaluation strategies and frameworks available for Secondary Schools and how gender-responsive and equity-focused have they been? In presentation of the study findings, this paper highlights the key policy frameworks available for evaluation of secondary education. It goes ahead to assess whether the said frameworks are gender-responsive or not, and whether they address equity issues in education access and performance. It looks at some of the factors that are considered in establishing indicators for evaluation of education, as well as what it is that makes these indicators gender-responsive and equity-focused. It then goes ahead to look at some of the strategies that have been used by Schools to make their evaluations gender-responsive as well as equity-focused. The next section of this paper looks at whether or not Schools are committed to gender-responsive and equity-focused evaluations, and how they ensure this is attained in their School setting. It also looks at the main assessment and evaluation methods and the uses of such assessment records in the Schools. The final section in this paper looks at some of the recommendations from the respondents on the possible ways of improving gender-responsiveness and equity-focus in evaluation of education access and performance.

Keywords: Evaluation; Frameworks; Testing; Assessment; Secondary Schools

II. REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Discussion on the role of education in strategies against poverty and exclusion and in the promotion of active citizenship and democracy is resurfacing in a context of a global economic crisis challenging the capacity of states to guarantee the provision and regulation of public services (Lebeau, Ridley & Lane, 2011). Only in the mid-1960s and early 1970s, with the increased demand for educational program and project evaluations coming from Governmental organisations and other agencies, did educational evaluation expand beyond the classroom into the entire educational system (Nero, 2006). Educational objectives can be broadly classified into three domains namely cognitive, affective and psychomotor. The cognitive objective refers to the intellectual results of schooling; the affective objectives refer to emotional education; while the psychomotor objectives refer to the physical manipulative skills learnt at school. These three domains may be described figuratively as belonging to the head (cognitive), the heart (affective) and the body (psychomotor). A comprehensive evaluation of the results of schooling should include examples from all these three domains (Nwana, 1979). In many countries, gender differentiation within education has become a key principle shaping the selection, distribution and evaluation of educational knowledge for young men and women (Arnot, 2002).

Gender patterns in education are central aspects of the relationship of education and society and transformation in society (Arnot, 2002). Great progress has been made in different sectors towards the realisation of gender goals in the MDGs, however, despite all this, significant gender inequalities in rights, resources, and voice persist in all developing countries, and in many areas the progress has been slow and uneven (World Bank, 2000). By the virtue of the number of years children are in school, schools have a role to play in furthering their moral development, despite the fact that other factors may be as crucial from the standpoint of influencing such development (Wagner, 1989).
The Millennium Development Goals challenge all UN member states to “eliminate gender disparity in primary and secondary education, preferably by 2005, and in all levels of education no later than 2015.” (Sutherland-Addy, 2008). The MDGs have been accused of primarily addressing the issue of access to primary education and do not include an explicit goal with respect to either the quality of instruction or to learning outcomes, such as literacy or numeracy (World Bank; 2006). Studies identifying causes underpinning the exclusion or inclusion of girls and boys in education have conveniently used the terms ‘supply’ and ‘demand’ to identify those factors arising from the provision of education and household investment, respectively, that constrain or facilitate education participation (Subrahmanian, 2002).

In Ghana, to achieve the goals of the education sector, the Ministry of Education is guided by the following values: Quality education; efficient management of resources; Accountability and transparency; and Equity (Government of Ghana, 2003). There is a mention of Equitable Access to Education, which centre on three key sub-sectors namely: Preschool education; Access and participation in education and training; Girls access to education.

According to OFSTED (2015), a document on schools inspection and evaluation in England, the inspection of a school provides an independent external evaluation of its effectiveness and a diagnosis of what it should do to improve. It also sets out the code of conduct for the inspectors/evaluators. However, a thorough inspection of the documents does not give an indication of a concern with gender-responsiveness or even equity-focus in the whole inspection and evaluation process.

In the Ireland case, there is a broader performance evaluation framework representing a new approach within the Irish Higher Education Authority to the presentation and organisation of data which is intended to support strategic planning at institutional and system levels. Within the context of the modernisation of Irish Higher Education over the past decade, there have been a number of initiatives which advance the development of a performance evaluation framework (O’connor et al., 2013). However, the concern has mainly been with the post-secondary institutions. Interestingly again, here also there is no attempt at gender-responsiveness or even equity-focus in the evaluation.

In Scotland, there is a framework for self-evaluation of the performance of education authorities. The process of self-evaluation is central to the maintenance of quality and the pursuit of excellence. It has become firmly established as the basis on which improvement planning and public reporting on standards and quality are founded (HMIE, 2006).

In the case of New Zealand, the Education Indicators Framework has been developed to help decision-makers to assess the health of the education system and to monitor education outcomes over time (NZQA, 1999; Ministry of Education, New Zealand, 2010). It is worth noting that in the New Zealand case, there is at least concern with demographic dimensions in terms of data disaggregation by gender and ethnicity. This certainly can address the gender-responsiveness and the equity-focus which is the subject matter of this study.

The key principles that should be borne in mind in any assessment should include inter alia: improvement of learning; enable progress in all important learning goals to be facilitated and reported; promotion of public understanding of learning goals relevant to students’ current and future lives; and should promote the active engagement of students in their learning and its environment (Gardner et al., 2010). In the context of classroom assessment, perhaps the most complex issue is whether teachers will be able to assess all their students fairly, accurately, and comprehensively. Such evaluation requires more than that teachers are unbiased; they must understand their students. Academic achievement is a threshold assessment – it captures a student’s ability to meet performance criteria. In this way, grades are intended to measure learning or knowledge; in other words, they are proxy measurements intended to capture attainment of learning objectives and acquisition of skills and competencies (York, Gibson, & Rankin, 2015).

In Kenya, during the last few years, major reforms and innovations have included the implementation of Free Primary and Free Day Secondary Education. This has enabled the Country to make significant progress towards attaining Education for All (EFA) and the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). To date, the main focus has been on improving levels of access, retention, equity, quality, relevance, and the overall efficiency of the education sector.

The following specific targets were set in the Kenya Education sector framework with regard to access and equity:

(i) A primary school NER of 100 % by 2015,
(ii) A completion rate of 100 % by 2010
(iii) Achievement of a transition rate of 70 % from primary to secondary school level from 47 %, paying special attention to girls’ education by 2008;
(iv) A 50% Net Enrolment Rate (NER) in Early Childhood Education (ECDE) by 2010;
(v) Gender parity at primary and secondary by 2015

As can be seen from the targets they are gender responsive, and aimed at equity-focus. What is not clear is how the targets are monitored and eventually evaluated at the Secondary School level. This constitutes the focus of this study.

III. EXISTING EVALUATION STRATEGIES AND FRAMEWORKS

It has emerged from the respondents that the kind of evaluation they conduct in Schools is double prong. They
assess skills as well as academics. Assessment refers to the methods or tools that educators use to evaluate, measure, and document the academic readiness, learning progress, skill acquisition, or educational needs of students. Assessment techniques are designed to gauge the effectiveness of the teaching and the quality of the learning taking place. A skill is the ability to carry out a task with pre-determined results often within a given amount of time, energy, or both. The skills students learn should reflect the specific demands that will be placed upon them in a complex, competitive, knowledge-based, information-age, technology-driven economy and society. Academic skills include: oral presentations, writing skills; critical thinking, self-initiative, group collaboration, as well as time management and technological literacy, and are essential to success in higher education. In non-academic skills, they assess the ability of the students in co-curricular activities. The Ministry of Education has a tool for assessment of co-curricular activities. There is also a tool for assessment in examinations. Skills look at the learner’s proficiency in sports, music and drama. The curriculum review process is already complete in Kenya, and the newly launched curriculum dubbed the Competency Based Curriculum (CBC) is going to orientate a learner based on their competencies. They need to help the learners attain their potentials to the maximum. The main tool for academic assessment is the grading system, which was developed by the Kenya national Examinations Council (KNEC), and it is the one that all Schools use nationally.

There is an Educational Framework (Republic of Kenya, 2012b), but there is specifically no Evaluation Framework provided by the Ministry of Education, but just testing guidelines. However, there is also a gender disaggregated capture tool under the National Education Management Information System (NEMIS). This provides details of age, gender, enrollment in numbers per class (access). It gives information on pupils family background for example how many are orphaned. It also looks at issues of sanitation facilities from a gender perspective whether these are available or not. The questionnaires are filled by the individual schools on an annual basis. The Sub-County Directors of Education (SCDE) summarises this and shares with the mainstream education stakeholders: Parents’ Association (PA); the School Board of Management (BOM); Development partners at the National level (UNICEF and others); the National Government Constituency Development Fund (NG-CDF) for purposes of bursary disbursement; NGOs and Government Departments. There are also health issues addressed in the Questionnaire, including deworming – how many students have been dewormed; giving girls sanitary towels etc.

The SCDE does the analysis of overall participation of the students. These include issues like daily attendance – how many girls and boys are absent and reasons for being absent. They compute the completion rates, as well as do a gender-disaggregated dropout rates analysis. They then compile achievement rates based on National Examination results, which is a globally accepted norm by UNESCO. The Education Management Information System (EMIS) Questionnaires are brought once in a year under the School Census questionnaires. One filled-in questionnaire remains at the School level, one at the Sub-County level and one goes to the National Headquarters. There are also provisions of teaching-learning materials available for use by the learners. The SCDE enters the data at the Sub-County level, while the Headquarters do their analysis at the National level and do a Report based on the EMIS. The guiding policy says that Schools should come up with a learner-friendly testing policy.

The Policy Framework provides that:

“The delivery of the curriculum is assessed through school based and end of school cycle. The school based examinations are both diagnostic and for placement to determine progression from one level to another. The national examinations at the end of cycle examinations are uniform throughout the country and are used to determine transition to next level.” (Republic of Kenya, 2012b)

Schools use many different kinds of tests to help identify the individual factors that may stand in the way of a child's successful learning. Academic-support strategies should be used that address the distinct learning needs, interests, aspirations, or cultural backgrounds of individual students and groups of students.

There is provision for internal and external examinations. There is the position of Director of Studies in Schools who are in charge of evaluations and assessments. There is a general consensus that there is no way you can rate people without giving them a ranking. Evaluation serves the purpose of ranking. Schools keep a record of assessments and this is usually under the custody of the Head of Departments (HODs). Every test that is given is recorded to assess the value-added progress. For example, what value has the student added since joining Form 1? The schools keep checking the entry behaviour of students by continually displaying the entry grade, this is the marks by which the student was admitted into the School. This gives a general picture whether the student was a high performing student at entry and whether or not there would some some improvement comparatively at the completion of the Secondary education. When the Schools are doing a District ranking, they have provisions for boys only, girls only and also comparative data. They do this, because it is only through this that they can determine the gender-specific needs, for example why do the boys and girls perform as they do in one subject and not the other, this can help inform the decisions they make with regard to teaching as well as assessment. Data needs to be disaggregated by gender, and the Schools have to do this. It is important to note that at this level, it is responsive to the needs and aspirations of both the boys and the girls.
When asked whether there is a Policy Framework for gender-responsiveness and equity-focus in evaluation of education at the National level, only 30.8% of the respondents answered in the affirmative. And out of these, there was an equal number of those mentioning the name of the said documents namely: the Gender and Education Policy of 2007 and the affirmative admission to Universities.

The table that follows shows the responses with regard to whether there is a policy framework for gender-responsive and equity-focused evaluation. At least 7 out of 10 respondents clearly mentioned that there was no policy framework that was both gender-responsive and equity-focused with regard to evaluation of education at the national level. And interestingly, the County level could not have such a framework because Secondary education was not a devolved function and as such, all the policies emanate from the National level. The people who responded to these two questions were the School Principles and in instances where they delegated, the responses were from the Deputy Principals who were in-charge of Academic Affairs. Actually the target respondents for this survey tool were any responsible School Administrators, who were well conversant with assessment and evaluation roles at the School.

The respondents were asked if there is a Policy Framework for gender-responsiveness and equity-focus in evaluation of education at the National level. It is interesting to note that for nearly 7 out of 10 respondents, they were not aware of any policy framework for gender-responsive and equity-focused evaluation of education. This is a clear picture that there was actually no overall guiding framework that was specific to evaluation of education. What was available was an overall Policy Framework for Education and Training (Republic of Kenya, 2012b), which only mentioned evaluation of education in passing. Out of the 3 in 10 respondents who indicated that there was a policy framework, an equal number of 50% for each, named the only two documents available, which were a manifestation of existence of a policy framework for evaluation that was both gender-responsive as well as equity-focused. The percentages presented are for all the respondents interviewed meaning that in total again, only 30.8% of the respondents could name a policy framework document. These are captured in the table that follows. This was in response to the Question: What is the name of the document and what does it provide with regard to gender? It is again telling that of the Gender documents mentioned, the Policy Framework for Education and Training (Republic of Kenya, 2012b) did not feature at all. This gives a clear indication that the respondents were not aware of that document as addressing issues of gender in education, leave alone evaluation of education.

The respondents went ahead to mention the key provisions of the documents that they named. For the Gender and Education Policy of 2007 (Republic of Kenya, 2007a) which had been revised in 2015 as the Education and Training Sector Gender Policy (Republic of Kenya, 2015a), the key provisions were to: Expand access to a gender sensitive and responsive quality education, Make all educational institutions gender, age and disability-friendly; Provide equitable resources, opportunities and participation for all learners regardless of age, gender, culture, and disability; Develop guidelines for gender-responsive intervention to enhance participation, retention and gender equity in education of all learners including those with special needs, Create a safe and protective learning and work environment to prevent sexual harassment and Gender Based Violence at all levels of education and training sector; and Develop and implement policies that address GBV at all levels of education and in the work place (Republic of Kenya, 2015a).

The Government of Kenya, through the National Action Plan for EFA of 2003, interpreted the essence of EFA Goal 5 and identified some of the following priorities in reaching gender equity and equality in education and training; increase enrolment of girls at all levels of the education system; increase retention and completion rates for girls; improve performance of girls in national examinations; improve performance of girls in mathematics and science in primary and secondary schools; improve awareness and support for girls’ education and provide gender-responsive teaching and learning materials and resources. (Republic of Kenya, 2012a; 2012b). These provisions are clearly gender-responsive as they provide for teaching and learning materials and resources that are gender-responsive. This means that in the evaluation also, should factor in these gender concerns as captured by appropriate indicators.

According to the Government of Kenya (2015b), National examinations provide a means of assessing the attainment of broad and specific goals of education, thus allowing a summative evaluation of the curriculum at the end of the respective cycle of education. They provide a means of making selection decisions to facilitate assignment of successful candidates to institutions and courses in the succeeding level of education. The evaluation at the Secondary School level lays the foundation for evaluation at subsequent education cycle; and according to the Commission on University Education (CUE, 2014), the nature of an academic programme is such that it shall facilitate a balanced learning process, ensuring that the students are able to acquire such cognitive, affective and psychomotor skills as are consistent with educational goals and aspirations of Kenyans. The Guidelines provide that the design of an academic programme shall take into account the Commission’s standards and ensure that the programme: is relevant and contextualized; contributes to the overall national human resource development and requirements and higher education reforms; is broad-based, diversified and integrated; and is as much as possible practical-orientation. Nowhere does the guideline provide that the nature of the gender-responsive or addresses equity concerns.

With regard to evaluation, the Commission on University Education (CUE, 2014), provides that the procedures for
evaluation of the courses of a given programme shall be clearly documented. The guidelines indicate that all aspects of a given course shall be evaluated. These include the: course content, instructional process, infrastructure and equipment for the delivery of the course, instructional and reference materials; and assessments. It also provides that feedback on course evaluation shall be utilized in decision-making with regard to the course in focus. In all this again, gender-responsiveness is clearly missing, and it would be difficult to evaluate what is not expressly provided for in the guiding framework.

A majority of the respondents mentioned that while gender is related to disadvantage in educational opportunities, other factors can compound disadvantage including: poverty or socio-economic status, ethnicity (which tribe a student belongs to), geographic location and conflict. The education system has been made in such a way that ethnicity is shunned and no documentation is available in almost all the Schools on ethnic origins of the students. This information is only available in National Schools, and mainly for purposes of comparison and in ensuring their admit students from all the regions of the country.

In terms of access, all the Schools use the registers to document attendance. They also use the Random Assessment Tests (RATs), the Continuous Assessment Tests (CATs) and End-of-term examinations for purposes of assessments. They have the Education Management Information System (EMIS), which provides data intake on an annual basis from each of the Schools.

Students’ background affects access to education. Poor parents cannot maintain students in boarding schools. Disparity in parent’s income also affects students’ access. Another factor that affects education is visits to the learners in the schools – those who are not visited feel isolated and this affects performances of the students. There is also the egocentric society – where everything is left for the parent. This is the “I don’t care” attitude of the community. Peer pressure also affects the students. Again, more than half of the respondents mentioned that most parents are keen on the results but they are not keen on the means to reach the end. This means that the parents are interested more in the outcome but not in the process. Parents move their children to schools based on the results of specific schools seen not to be performing well, while others are seen to be performing well.

It is evident from the respondents, that strong disparities exist in access and performance of the boys and the girls at the secondary level, especially in the Mixed Schools, skewed on the side of boys; however it is also important to note that the girls are catching up, slowly by slowly. Generally, Gender disparity is greater at upper secondary education compared to lower secondary, even though it was beyond the scope of this study to attempt an explanation for this disparity at the upper Secondary level.

It has been mentioned by the respondents that there are also cases of examination malpractices that start from Primary School level all the way to Secondary Schools, a general feeling is that these are usually students from the Academies. One of the respondents says:

“Most parents are keen on the results and not on the means to reach the end. They are interested in the outcome and not in the process. Parents move their children to schools based on the results of a specific school.” [Principal, Boys Boarding School]

Evaluators generally check the value addition of the School, which involves checking the performance of the students vis-à-vis the entry behaviour or marks at Class 8. Another issue that affects the performance of the students is the strictness of the teachers and students discipline. This makes the lazy students drop-out as they cannot cope. The competitive nature of the 8-4-4 system of education also makes the teachers concentrate so much on academics and forget about extra-curricular and co-curricular activities as well as hidden talents of the students.

Each and every School has got its own mechanisms of assessment of students. The national policy is that students must be assessed, but there are no clear guidelines on how this should be done, especially with regard to testing. Most Schools have three cycles of examinations per term, with one cycle done every month. They also have CATs per subject based on teacher preferences.

Though there is an Evaluation Framework provided from the Ministry of Education (Republic of Kenya, 2012b), there are no specific guidelines on testing. This therefore means that each School has to come up with their individualised testing system. Secondary Schools also have guidelines from the Teachers Service Commission (TSC). The one from the TSC is performance appraisal. Actually the TSC one is for assessment of the Teachers. Generally, in assessment we are talking about what the testing policy is, with regard to the evaluation of the students, as well as keeping a progress record of the students. The testing policy talks about having CATs. But then it is up to the school to determine when and how to conduct the assessment. There is a general feeling that students should not be subjected to end-term examinations. So most Schools are moving towards using the averages of the CATs at the end of the term. It is important to mention here that the concept of CATs is moving from Continuous Assessment Test to Competence Assessment Tests, while retaining the acronym but bringing in the element of assessing core competency areas, and to align each to all specific levels within the Basic and tertiary Education cycle.

There is usually an evaluation document to be filled-in when the District Quality Assurance and Standards Officers (DQASO) come for assessment. The Team does assessment of all aspects of the School. In terms of enrollment, they look at the boys and girls admissions. In terms of access to education,
they look at issues like: how do we create access? How do we retain the students? What are the completion rates? What is the quality of the education or studies? Have we been able to add any value? Schools look at the entry behaviour of the student – this is like the baseline. If the student enters with below average and leaves with above average, then it shows that the School has added value. This is geared towards producing an evaluation that is gender-responsive. However, it is still not possible to capture equity concerns in this evaluation document. It has not been possible to get a blank Evaluation Form to share here as once downloaded, the Principals fill them in and submit to the County Office.

Increasingly, Schools have began to check which games the students take part in; which clubs they belong to, to find out what other skills students possess and whether or not they are producing all-rounded students. As one respondent mentioned:

> There is also need to check the pastoral care of the students, and also the guidance and counselling department to ascertain how effective they are. This is mainly with a view to check on the character formation of the students. – [Principal, Girls Boarding School]

However, it is equally important to mention that this position was reflected from a Catholic-Church sponsored School, showing the importance the Church-sponsored Schools lay on guidance and counselling as well as pastoral care of students.

Schools normally give the Annual EMIS returns. At the County level, there are two documents – the EMIS document and the Annual Returns document showing admissions and the constituency from which the student comes. This annual returns document is for the National Schools and the Extra-County Schools only as they admit students from all over the country. The document shows the levels of absenteeism, retention and progression.

One Principal said:

> “We have our own internal Mock Examinations for the Form 4s. We used to have joint examinations but we stopped because it was taking too much of the time of the staff who were also expected to teach other classes. The Ministry provide that there should be CATs, but then this is dependent on internal arrangement of the School because the students have to be assessed regularly.” [Principal, Girls Boarding School]

Schools are guided by the Basic Education Act of 2013, which speaks of gender-responsiveness in education access and performance. According to the Act, girls should not be denied access to education. The Act provides that “A school or person responsible for admission shall not discriminate against any child seeking admission on any ground, including ethnicity, gender, sex, religion, race, colour or social origin, age, disability, language or culture.” (Republic of Kenya, 2013). This in essence means that, even if a girl gets pregnant, they should not be denied access. The Act provides that girls remain in School until such a period that they are nearing delivery. Schools administrations have to speak to the girls to stick to finish the academic term. After delivery, Schools give the girls time to make a decision to come back to School. There is actually a National Policy on Re-admission of Pregnant girls to School once they have delivered. In most Schools, the students set for themselves the targets for each subject based on their performances, but they are guided by the teachers to realise their targets.

There are concerns that the Ministry of Education is doing very little to track those out of School. There is no tool to track this. This is a serious equity concern that needs to be reflected in evaluation as there are different reasons as to why School-going children be out of School. These are equity concerns that impact not only on access, but equally performance of the students. There are some Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) that are following on those out of School, even though the Ministry only focuses on those in School. One of the local NGO that focuses on out-of School children is IMPACT Research. This they do through their Dreams Project, which seeks to bring dropout children back to School. They also support those already in School. One respondent clarifying this position said:

> “… But there are some Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) that are following on those out of School. The Ministry only focuses on those in School. One such NGO is IMPACT Research through their Dreams Project of bringing dropout children back to School.” [Principal, Private Academy]

The national policy is that students must be assessed, but each School has the flexibility to develop their own testing policy based on availability of resources. These are all guided by the National Testing Policy. The policy talks of regular CATs for students. These are meant to test the areas already covered of the syllabus. They test various skills – cognitive, knowledge, memory, applications, and analysis among other areas. All Special Schools are categorised as National Special Secondary Schools. This is a general principle that factors in equity of access to ensure that the special needs children do not miss out on School access, especially the ones that have specialised facilities to address their special concerns.

All educational assessment is tied to the National goals of education. Assessment is done to ensure education is for National unity; education is for personal growth and National development; for appreciation and preservation of culture; as well as education for international cooperation and integration. At every level of education, at least one or two goals of education are achieved in evaluation. For purposes of National unity, all the students sit for the same examination; this ensures some aspect of credibility because of uniformity.
Evaluation is done to place a learner either internally or externally. Internally is usually with regard to class positioning, provision of index numbers as well as transition (although there is now a policy that ensures 100% transition, so no student repeats a class, even if they are at the bottom of the class). Externally is usually with regard to transition to the next educational cycle or level, in this particular case, to the University level. There are also have learners with special needs. For this category, care is taken of their interests by having examinations with large prints, especially for those with sight problem; and brailles for those who are blind. The National Education Sector Planning (NESP) document indicates that there is need for ensuring automatic progression and transition within and across basic education levels, and it also prioritises the establishment of sustainable Education Management Information System (EMIS) and supporting micro-planning using Geographic Information System (GIS) tools (Republic of Kenya, 2015b), which will go along way in improving the evaluation function in the education sector. There is also provision to give more time for examination for the learners with special needs. The learners with special needs are taken care of in the final grading at the National level. They are also accorded placement at a lower grade for example when they want to join Teachers Training Colleges (TTCs).

The main goals of evaluation in Secondary Schools include inter alia: to determine factors that include: access to education; the learning environment, availability of teaching-learning resources, determine the adequacy of the human resource provision to implement the curriculum, administrative issues and factors, and the management of resources at the School level. The goal of evaluation includes to prepare students for KCSE examinations, to prepare the students for acceptance in the society, prepare them for employment, develop their skills and competencies in both curricular as well as co-curricular activities; and also to establish the norms and values of society.

There is a general consensus among the respondents that any project if not evaluated, we cannot know progress. We need to determine performance. That is why we have performance appraisals. This also helps to determine talent or skills. Evaluation can help to place people in appropriate careers.

One respondent had this to say:

“How can we be able to separate the Mathematician from the Musician? It is only evaluation that can help us do this. Evaluation also helps in establishing commitment in the students and the teachers alike. To some extent, the Schools achieve these goals of evaluation. They are the ones who do the internal evaluation, and it is the students who have been performing well that end up also performing well in the national Examinations.” [SCDE, Gem Sub County Education Office].

Assessment is conducted to get quality; to ensure that the education policy is followed, and also to maintain some level of standards in academics. Assessment also helps for purposes of promotion based on performance; progression to the next level in class is usually based on students’ assessment. There are assessments based on reports in the School, for example health status, academic status, general feeling of the stakeholders on the administrative staff and so on.

One Principal of a top performing Girls School, said:

“It is important to get feedback on what we have been teaching. Did the students understand what was taught? The marks obtained will show the performance of the students, and this will show the teacher whether to go ahead or if there is need to go back on what has already been taught, if the students did not understand clearly. We also assess to know the ability of the students in various subjects usually the academic assessment. If the students are found to be below average, especially the slow-learners, the teachers find a way of making the students catch up with the fast-learners. The Schools do achieve the goals of assessment. They get feedback and they have to re-teach and assess again. The assessments are also meant to prepare the students for KCSE examinations and for their future careers.” – [Principal, Girls Boarding School, Extra-County]

From the foregoing, it is important to mention that in the Girls only Schools, evaluations do not have gender-disaggregated data. This is also the case with Boys only Schools. The issue of gender-disaggregated data is only seen in Mixed Schools. However, all schools need to capture data on the socio-economic characteristics of all the students as this in one way or the other affects access as well as performance of the students.

Assessment is done to determine the performance of the students; for purposes of guidance and counselling; for ranking so that the best performing students and those performing poorly are known, thereby see if there is any improvement in the performance of the students. Assessment is also done to determine the academic ability of the students, as well as to assist in placing the students in the various subjects for the Kenya Certificate of Secondary Education (KCSE). Assessment is done to ensure compliance with the syllabus provisions and coverage and the impact of that coverage on the performance of the students. It helps in knowing the levels of performance of the students, and also to better plan for the future. The assessments help to understand the capabilities of the students, as well as in giving feedback to the parents.

Evaluation in the case of the teaching and non-teaching staff is done for purposes of promotion and in the case of students, it is for purposes of progression, although the Government policy requires that each student continues to the end
regardless of performance. Assessments are to prepare the students for the National examinations, and for the teachers to know which areas to concentrate on more, depending on the performance of the students. Majority of the Schools (10 out of the 13 sampled Schools) maintain that they cannot achieve all the goals of evaluation; however, they strive to achieve the maximum always. In stressing why evaluations are important in Secondary School settings and why they are done, one of the respondents said:

“We do evaluations because we want to assess whether the curriculum is being implemented effectively. We want to find out if the School is implementing the policies of the Ministry of Education. We also want to establish if the physical facilities or provisions are conducive for learning; for example in terms of sanitation, the ration for boys should be 30 students per door, while for girls it should be 25 per door. We also need to have ramps for persons with disabilities. Evaluation also helps to ascertain whether the output of the teachers is up to the expected standard.” – [Female Principal of a Mixed Day Secondary School].

Assessments are done to find out whether effective learning has taken place, to verify whether students understand what is being taught; whether what is being taught has been well conceptualised; whether the objectives of the curriculum have been implemented; as well as determine the relevance and significance of the curriculum to the learners. At the end of the four-year period, if students do well, the School can say that we have achieved the objectives. However, there are other things that students learn that are not examined.

On whether or not evaluation achieves the set goals, one of the respondents said:

“Evaluation is usually not done as it should be done. It takes so long for the evaluation to be done, so we don’t achieve our objectives. When it is done, it takes so long again to get feedback in form of a Report. The Report should be shared with the Board of management for action plan. This is lacking at times if the Board does not have the capacity.” – [Female Principal of a Mixed Day Secondary School].

In cases of poor performances by the students, the teachers are forced to repeat what they have taught in class so the students can understand better. They also create extra-time for coaching otherwise known as remedials. The teachers talk to the students to find out why they are not picking, and then give extra work in particular areas where a student is found to be weak. The teachers also identify individual areas of weakness and act on this.

Another respondent added:

“The tests are a means to achieve the National goals of education. Certainly, we have to achieve the goals of education assessment. Even the teaching in itself is geared towards the achievement of the goals of evaluation. We have to achieve the goals, only that the levels of achievement may differ from individual student to another.” – [Principal, Special National School]

According to the Education Policy Framework, the National Goals of Education and Training for the Department of Education, include: to foster nationalism, patriotism and promote national unity; promote the socio-economic, technological and industrial skills for the country’s development; promote individual development and self-fulfillment; promote sound moral and religious values; promote social equality and responsibility; promote respect for and development of Kenya’s rich and varied cultures; promote international consciousness and foster positive attitudes towards other nations; and to promote positive attitudes towards good health and environmental protection (Republic of Kenya, 2012b). Even though the framework clearly outlines the goals of education and training, it is silent on the goals of evaluation for the same.

Assessment is a way of making sure that the students attend classes regularly and also to keep the mental faculties of the students alert. Through assessments, the teachers are able to know the performance of the students and monitor their progress. Those who miss examinations or attendance in classes may not proceed to the next level. The majority of the respondents are also in agreement that more testing a student is exposed to, the more ready they are for the final examinations. They are meant to prepare students for literacy careers and talent development. It is also meant to screen for the different areas the students will go to after School.

The registration or access to education depends on the catchment area of the School. Generally, there are more girls than boys doing class 8 examinations, and consequently, in the rural catchment areas, there are more girls than boys getting admission into Form 1. This is the information that has emerged from a cross-section of the respondents, especially in the rural Schools, away from the Town centres or major shopping centres. An explanation of this phenomenon from a majority of the respondents is that there has been a lot of campaigns for the education of the girl-child and this is having a great impact in terms of girls access to education. Another measure of access is how many students there are in each stream and the number of streams a School is registered for. A majority of the respondents also mentioned that boys are affected in that majority of them start fending for their orphaned families at tender age, and therefore do not give education a priority.

According to one key stakeholder:

“The goals of evaluation in Schools include determining whether teachers are doing the right thing. To identify the gaps that exist in a learning
institution – challenges that exist in an institution. Reports are to be used as feedback mechanism or tools to be shared with the stakeholders. We also evaluate to be able to address any challenges noted.”

- [DQASO]

The Quality Assurance and Standards Offices (QASO) are more interested in transition than evaluation or assessment. The Officers explained that evaluation of access to education is generally beyond the capacity of the Quality Assurance and Standards Office (QASO). Access to education is generally under administration of education and that falls under the docket of the County Director of Education (CDE). However, the Schools in the County have tried to open up more streams to increase access. There are a few Special Needs Schools (SNSs), and they are trying to mainstream the disabled into the normal School system. But this can only be successful if the Government provide funds and facilities. In the end, as a result of assessments, students get quality education and parents get value for the money they invest in education. [DQASO].

It has emerged from the key informants that the key gender concerns raised in the documents they mentioned are in policy planning, budgeting, curriculum development, the promotion of generation of sex disintegrated data to guide interventions, and promotion of women’s rights and economic empowerment.

IV. UNDERLYING PROBLEMS IN EDUCATIONAL EVALUATION IN SECONDARY SCHOOLS

Because of the different categories of Schools, there are resource challenges. The syllabus coverage is also different, so in reality, it becomes cumbersome to compare those who have completed the syllabus with those who have not completed the syllabus. The level of honesty is also lacking at the School level. There are students who cheat in examinations while others don’t. So we cannot accurately compare these performances. Summative evaluation at the end of the four years of study is not a very accurate way to determine a student’s ability. The one-off system of examination is not appropriate. In the curriculum review, there are proposals of a consolidated way of assessing performance from Form one to Form four, something a kin to trend analysis. Through this mode of assessment, performance over time would contribute to the final assessment.

In more than half of the Schools, the respondents indicated that there is inadequate teaching staff or human resource for evaluation at the School level. However, in a good number of the Schools, especially the County Schools in the rural areas, there is also the shortage of curriculum implementers, the teaching-learning facilities, especially the infrastructure endowments – classrooms, laboratories, dormitories and so on. There is also the challenge of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) or the digitisation programme as some schools do not have the necessary equipment. These greatly impact negatively on evaluation of education, leave alone making the evaluation gender-responsive and equity-focused.

A cross-section of the respondents have mentioned that a major challenge of assessment or evaluation is that they have always been known to be exam-oriented in the Kenyan system. While the ideal evaluation system should be all-rounded and take into cognizance also the co-curricular activities. Another underlying problem of evaluation is assessment done when some students are not in school because they have been sent home for fees; the Schools also need sufficient funds to prepare for the evaluation. There were concerns raised by the respondents about the likelihood of some students not performing well because they come from poor family backgrounds and are always sent home for fees when other students are learning. One of the respondents mentioned that:

“Some bright students are at times not able to raise funds for fees and this greatly affects their performances. There are also some unscrupulous teachers who don’t mark the CATs and RATs, but end up just giving marks arbitrarily, just for the sake of beating deadlines. This therefore does not give a clear picture of the performance of the students.” [Principal, Mixed Day and Boarding Secondary School].

Some students also miss CATs and RATs, so it is not easy to make a general evaluation of the students based on the final examination including the continuous assessments.

There is the problem of School administrators viewing evaluation as being investigative. Assessment is usually viewed from a quality assurance perspective; while evaluation is mainly from an academic performance perspective. One key informant had this to say:

“Many School administrators view assessment as being investigative. They look at it from a fault-finding perspective... The selection of students is usually done at the National level and is computerised. However, not all students admitted to a School are able to report for various reasons. Those who fail to report are usually replaced by other students. Retention in Schools is usually based on the choice of the student. What we need to ask ourselves is whether or not the child is comfortable in the School... We calculate the numbers that get into School and the numbers that get out. We also look at the transition rates, as well as access and retention rates. In terms of performance, we usually look at the value addition.” [Principal, Boys Boarding School]

Some Schools have gotten into the habit of encouraging other people (usually external actors) to set the examinations and then they use these to gauge how their students perform. They
usually buy the examinations from professional Examination Setters, and also engaging in Joint Mock examinations. However, these habits are increasingly fading fast with the restructuring in the education sector.

There are those who perform well and there are those students who perform below standards due to various reasons. This therefore means that the teachers have to schedule remedial lessons in the afternoons or in the mornings, depending on whether the Schools are day or boarding. The teachers identify the slow-learners who are to benefit from these remedial lessons; however, in the Extra-County Schools, the remedials are for everyone, and in most cases, there are no payments for remedial lessons, while in the small rural County and Sub-County Schools, there is some payment for remedial lessons, and this as well brings in equity issues as it disadvantages those from the poor backgrounds and ultimately impacts on their performance.

There are also cases of cheating by the students in examinations; student fear examinations and because of this, others absent themselves from the School on examination days. Some teachers also don’t set examinations to the ability of the students – they simply get already set examinations, which normally are not tailored to what the teachers have taught. As a result of these externally set examinations, students get discouraged when examinations test what they have not been taught.

Most respondents (9 out of 13 respondents) maintain that the curriculum is very heavy and the time for coverage is short, so at times the teachers don’t give tests as much as they would have wished to do. There are however concerns with the Special Schools that they don’t have any preferential treatment when it comes to assessments. One of the respondents coming from such a School says:

“This is a Special School giving the girls an opportunity to access education. However, there is no special consideration in admission, as the general criteria is that it is a girls School and must admit students as such. However, because of the catchment area, which is small in size, the administration looks for even girls who could have dropped out of School to come back for studies. The School has established a Baby-Care just across the School fence where the babies of the girl-students could be taken care of; but during break-time and lunch-time, the mothers could go across and breast-feed their babies. The administration has hired someone to take care of the babies. This really gave the School a good reputation, and those girls who had dropped-out started coming back for admission. The School counsels the girls to accept their situation. There are also cases of young wives in School – these are the young girls who had dropped-out of School and got married. However, there is not so much issue with their attending School, as the husbands are not worried about possible cases of infidelity, given that this is a Girls only School.” – [Principal, Special Girls Day School – Experimental].

This kind of admission for students, especially the young wives in School, has a great impact on the performance of the students, as they have divided attention of attending to School academic work while also responding to domestic responsibilities as parents. Though, it also does not come without challenges. The main challenges include the mothers taking children to the clinic therefore missing School days, also taking care of the babies at night does not give the mothers ample time to do revision work at home or even homework. This is what makes it mandatory for the School to have all the Form four students become borders, to provide them with a conducive environment for their learning. Other students can also board, but for the Form four students it is compulsory.

Some students don’t take assessments seriously. There are cases of students scoring lower than their abilities because of lack of concentration. There is also the challenge of resources e.g producing the examination papers. The funds given from the National Government for Subsidised Secondary Education (SSE) is usually delayed and is not always enough.

The respondents also mentioned other challenges to the evaluation process for example factors beyond the control of the School administration:

“There is also external interference with the School operations, for example the shortening of the third term while the Schools had programmed to do say 2 CATs and an end-term examination. So the School ended up only doing one examination. There is a shortage of teachers, and sometimes marking takes a very long time.” – [Principal, Mixed Day Secondary School].

Some Schools have only one teacher handling a subject from Form one to Form four. This is a big challenge when it comes to testing as marking becomes a big problem, thereby affecting the frequency of testing and with it effective assessment of performance. There are cases of performance of girls being very bright in Forms 1 and 2, but when they reach Form 3, their performances start to deteriorate, although these are exceptional cases. The main cause of this trend can be attributed to the changes in the social life of the girl-students, especially the biological changes in their bodies and the awareness of their ‘grown-up’ status, where they start to engage in romantic relationships with boys either in School or outside.

There is also the challenge of lack of learning materials. In some day Schools students have to share textbooks, and not all get access to the reading materials equally. There is pressure on the students to perform from both the parents and the School. There is so much expectation and this forces some students to be dishonest by resorting to unscrupulous means
of passing examinations. Some Schools don’t even have sufficient resources for purposes of assessment.

There are also individual differences among the learners. The education system does not take care of slow-learners. This phenomenon, coupled with the earlier mentioned lack of facilities for evaluation or even the manpower is a major challenge for evaluation. There is limited time for individualised attention because of the large numbers of students admitted by the Schools. The performance of orphaned students is usually affected by their levels of poverty or their economic conditions: others are sent home for fees while others are sick and are either in hospital or remain at home during assessment times. This generally affects both their access as well as performance in examinations. In the assessments, students are treated as if they were all present during the term dates, yet some were not there. Evaluation is time-consuming as there is no specific provision for the evaluation in terms of time allocation. There is no special time provision for evaluation, so at times, the Schools are forced to administer examinations at night, so it does not take too much of the teaching time during the day.

Another challenge of assessment is that students who are weak in class might get demoralised if they persistently perform poorly in examinations. So some Schools decide not to put on Notice Boards the results of the students. Some Schools perform poorly in examinations. So some Schools decide not to put on Notice Boards the results of the students. One of the respondents in backing this claim says:

“... However, the School adopts different grading for the Languages and the Sciences, depending on the academic levels of students. We raise or lower the grading marks based on performance. If the performance is low, we also reduce the cut-off points, for the sake of motivating the students. Motivation is one of the key provisions of the education policy and we do this at the School level by adjusting the grading system. This encourages the students to work even harder to maintain the high grade, and in this process, the grades improve.”

[Principal, Private Academy]

More than half of the respondents [8 out of 13] observed that it is not possible to assess all the students at the same time because not all students are present at the same time. Some are sick or some have been sent home for fees. All the same, Schools have adopted different strategies to address these eventualities with regard to students personal conditions as well as socio-economic conditions.

“Because of this high enrollment of students, individualised attention will not be easy to give to the students. So the lazy students will continue being lazy because they do not get personalised attention. Our general admission requirement into Form 1 is 400 and above marks; while in special cases, we admit students with a minimum of 370 Points. There are different approaches used by the instructors. We have 6 streams and different teachers handling different subjects. The attitude of the teacher is also a challenge. They do the very minimal basic. This means that the slow-learners do not catch-up easily.” – [Principal, Boys National School].

Some respondents have indicated that one of the challenges with assessment is that some students are very lazy and unwilling to work unless pushed. Other challenges include the teacher’s level of experience in the profession. The high teacher turnover in most of the Schools, also affects students assessment. Parental support is also crucial. Most of the respondents say that there are parents who do not support academic progress of their students. They do not take positively the invitation to discuss their students’ progress at School. There are also students who are burdened by home or family issues – orphans, parental separations, deaths, illnesses and so on. There are also a few cases of indisciplined students and this affects their performance.

For the special category of students in the Special National Schools, the education system itself is a challenge. It does not take into cognizance other talents and skills. The education policies assume the special child. The education system is not tailored or domesticated to the special child. Even the current curriculum content is not sensitive to the students with hearing impairment. The examination system is designed to be oral through the written form, while the hearing-impaired students use visual language to communicate. This case is so discriminatory that made one respondent to remark:

“There is also an assumption that all the students see. The practical examinations are set without due consideration for this. The Kenya Institute of Curriculum Development (KICD) has a policy that a student should be tested in their language of instruction. We instruct our students using the sign language, but when it comes to testing, they are tested in English. The Kenya National Examinations Council (KNEC) is not open to training teachers for special examinations setting and marking. Books and other learning materials have not been adapted to the students with special needs.” – [Principal, Special National School].

There is the challenge of free access to education for the children with special needs. Whereas in principal they are free to access education, in reality, there are so many challenges that make the parents not be able to take their children with special needs to School. There is increase in the numbers of pupils with the introduction of the Free Primary Education (FPE) policy at Primary level. With this comes an increase in the transition rates. There is a shortage of teaching staff to handle the huge students population that transition to the Secondary level. It is emerging from the field data that there is also no budgetary allocation for evaluation or assessment from the National Government, and parents are not willing to
chip in because they believe the Government is providing everything.

For the District Quality Assurance and Standards Officers, due to the congested School programmes, assessments have to be structured within the term, yet there are already too many meetings and programmes running during the term. At the DQASO level, there are also challenges of finance, where the Officer in-charge has to get extra funding to take care of the extra assessment staff. One of the DQASOs had this to say:

“A lot of our Schools are under-staffed. All Schools are ranked together yet there are some Schools that picked the best students in KCPE. This should not be the case.” – [DQASO].

REFERENCES