

Tenets and Shortcomings of School and Student Rankings Based on Academic Performance at Secondary Level National Examinations in Kenya

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Abstract: Academic examinations and result rankings has been tipped as the culmination of education achievement by a student in the country. This is manifested through the certificates that are issued with different grades. However, despite having students that excel and those that fail, there still remains the critical issue of quality vis-à-vis the academic outcomes and ranking. It is based on this premise that this paper attempts to give an insight on the implications of ranking students nationally in examinations. This paper employs a desk review method, and endeavoured to answer the following questions: Has the academic system of ranking students nationally helped shape the career destiny of students? What have been the merits and demerits of academic rankings in the country? Has the academic ranking tradition enhanced equity in education quality in the country? What are some of the remedies to the identified bottlenecks in the academic ranking systems of students? The general findings include: one, there has been cases of massive disparity in terms of allocation of staff personnel, finances and infrastructure, that has enhanced social stratification in terms of national, extra county, county, sub county and private schools. Two, there has been the rise of examination malpractices such as cheating for excellence purposes, that has diluted the quality of curriculum delivery among teachers who are its custodians. This paper is thus of the view that, the Ministry of Education is on the right path in discarding academic rankings to enhance quality of curriculum delivery to its students, tapping and nurturing of students talents, and bringing up a holistic all round student to fit in society. This paper thus recommends that more research and inputs should be done on this education sector, more so, on the competency based curriculum to improve it even further, as it is the way to salvage our education standards.

Keywords: Academic Rankings, National Examinations, Curriculum, Student, Performance, Grade

1. Introduction

Since the beginning of the millennium, education access and transition rates have been on an upward trajectory in low income countries, such as the sub Saharan Africa (Evans & Acosta, 2021). In essence, statistics show that there has been an increase of approximately 50 percent of school enrolments in sub Saharan Africa (Evans & Acosta, 2021). This foregoing is catalyzed by the desired need of achieving goal number two of the millennium development goal (MDG), which aimed at achieving universal primary education by 2015 (UNESCO, 2011). In supporting this course in Kenya, the ball was rolled on the ground

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through the National Rainbow Coalition (NARC) administration ratification and introduction of universal free primary education, that saw the enrolment rates of students rise from 92 percent in 2002 to 104 percent in the year 2003 (Wanjohi, 2010).

This move was geared by the fact that education plays an instrumental role in molding complete individuals, and spurs development in society (Onyango, Maiyo & Ndiku, 2019). In other words, education is a process that is held with high esteem in any functional and purpose driven society.

In underscoring the significance of education, President Julius Nyerere was of the view that, education is an arsenal that brings true liberation to both an individual and society at large (Sanga, 2017). To him, he related the existing relationship between an individual and society, with each complementing each other. In other words, the nature of a particular society is a true reflection of its people that is, the more learned they are, the more liberal they become. In essence, therefore, President Nyerere held the thought that, through education, it was much easier to bring a strong intellectual hurricane that is able to free individuals consciousness from rigidity and archaic thoughts, through re-awakening and re-booting the way they exercise their social, cultural, political and moral practices to self-belief, independence and increased problem solving at the society level (Sanga, 2017). On his part, President Nelson Mandela when expressing his thoughts on the pivotal role education plays, he said:

Education is the great engine of personal development. It is through education that the daughter of a peasant can become a doctor, that the son of a mine worker can become the head of the mine, that a child of farm workers can become the President of a great nation. It is what we make out of what we have, not what we are given, that separates one person from another (wikipedia).

In a nutshell, therefore, the introduction of free primary education was geared towards alleviating the existing bottlenecks that included exclusion of children from marginalized geographical locations in arid and semi-arid lands (ASAL), informal settlements, children with disabilities and those in rural areas (Ireru, Kingendo, Wangila & Thurunira, 2020). The aftermath of this quantitative achievement by the government in terms of enrolment led to the next phase of quality of the curriculum that was delivered to its recipients, the students (Siocha, Onderi & Mwebi, 2017). In an aerial view, increased student enrolment overstretched the limited resources, more so, in the public schools, in terms of infrastructure, staff personnel and stationaries (Siocha, Onderi & Mwebi, 2017). The transition of these students to secondary schools thus generally posed a challenge to the existing schools.

The subsequent topical concern of every education quality outcome as an end product in the country has been students undertaking national examinations (Sylvia & Orodho, 2014). In Kenya, students sit for the Kenya Certificate of Secondary Education (KCSE) as a culmination that marks the end of their four-year study (Kosgei, 2020). These examinations are used to assess the individual performance of students, and enable them join different universities, colleges and tertiary institutions (Inyega, Ayaz, Naseem, Mahaya & Elsayed, 2021). However, there emerges an issue regarding the quality of the curriculum, and to a certain extent, the place of its ranking system in the academic fields (Mang'eni, 2018). In the country, there are majorly five cadres of schools that include: National, Extra County, County, Sub County and private schools that have different financial endowment (Clark, 2015). In this arrangement, most national and

extra county schools perform much better, with this attributed towards their financial resource advantage, as compared to their counterparts in the private sector (Xie & Zhang, 2020).

Every year, the Ministry of Education (MOE) has had the tradition of releasing KCSE results to the public. This is normally accompanied by pomp and colour to the victors, with the villain exhibiting somber mood. This victor versus villain perspective leaves a number of students to feel unworthy, as this academic rankings bring the aspect of stratification (Korir & Kipkemboi, 2014). This is attributed to the existing culture of celebrating those students that attain minimum university entry grade of C+ (plus) (Xie & Zhang, 2020). The question to ponder is where will those who miss university entry grades whose number is huge go to? In essence, the table below shows statistical distribution of KCSE examination results between the years 2018 and 2021.

Table 1: Source Kenya National Examinations Council statistics

Year	A	A-	B+	B	B-	C+	C	C-	D+	D	D-	E
2021	1138	5973	13463	25045	39683	59843	81345	99406	116355	145916	187264	46151
2020	893	6420	14427	25207	38194	57999	85458	109454	117898	121942	137361	280046
2019	627	5796	13366	24478	35340	46139	63102	83358	101687	137713	152339	29318
2018	315	3417	8268	16403	26156	35818	40707	71047	114176	147918	165139	30840

From the above tabular presentation, a number of insights can be drawn. One, it can be deduced that a very low number of students nationally attain the grade A in the country for the defined timeframe. In other words, it can be termed as a drop in the ocean compared to the total number of students that sit for the examinations, as the number has been rising slowly from 315 in 2018 to 1138 in 2021. The concern that crops up is, what triggers such low numbers in this grade, which are these schools that produce such grades, and is there fairness in terms of distributing resources such as infrastructure, finances and staff personnel. In addition, the number of grade A after the burning of academic rankings by the Ministry of Education (MOE) is low as compared to before. In essence, in 2017, the MOE reported a total of 141 students that obtained grade A as compared to 2685 in 2016 (Oduor, 2017). This huge disparity in

reduction thus brings forth the discourse revolving around the pros and cons of academic rankings in our curriculum, and generally the quality of our curriculum delivery and graduates.

Secondly, in order to access university placement, its ticket is pegged on attaining a minimum of a C+ (plus) (Njiru, Karuku & Nyaga, 2020). In essence, obtaining a better grade enables one secure a lucrative course such as medicine, architecture, actuarial science, law, engineering, computer science and so forth. Due to limited opportunities, there have been cases where students, teachers and parents have corroborated to employ dubious means such as examination malpractices, such as cheating and drilling of students for academic excellence (Amutabi, 2019). The major point of worry is that secondary level of education prepares the higher learning abilities of a student at a higher level (Rcragun, Deborahcragun & Piotrus, 2010). Taking the route of focusing more on examination excellence delimits the ability of the student to attain critical competencies such as intrapersonal and interpersonal, critical thinking and problem solving abilities (Rcragun, Deborahcragun & Piotrus, 2010). In addition, such students are considered as 'half baked' and struggle or even drop the courses they are enrolled in at the university level (Abuya et al. 2015).

Thirdly, since the introduction of our 8-4-4 curriculum in the yester year of 1985, its graduates have been at the pinnacle of providing labour force to our economy (USAID, 2014). However, as presented in table 1 above, it is evident that a majority of students miss out on the opportunity of joining universities. In essence, the number of students that have missed university opportunities from 2018 to 2021 stands at 2,665,940. This figure thus opens a discourse on its causal factors and their future fate of being integrated into the country's economy.

Assessment is an important process that gives a scorecard of the student achievement at the end of an education process (Aina, Bratti & Lippo, 2021). In our case, during national examinations, the results have been ranked in terms of the performance of students, schools and subjects (Njiru, Karuku & Nyaga, 2020b). In a nutshell, this process presents the general strengths and weaknesses of the curriculum recipients and addresses the emerging teething problems (Amunga, Amadalo & Maiyo, 2010). In doing so, a number of parameters have to be factored in, namely; communication and writing, interpersonal, problem solving, arithmetic and technical abilities. Unfortunately, teachers have invested their energy in teaching examinable subjects, at the expense of individual student's talents (Abuya et al. 2015). This thus exhibits an element of desperado among key education stakeholders such as teachers, students and parents in order to make headlines on the local dailies, and be considered academic giants (Amutabi, 2019). This dangerous teaching methodology have left its learners having burning questions, that is, if my desire is to do course x at the university, how does subject y help me even though am studying it at secondary level (Njiru, Karuku & Nyaga, 2020a). It is based on this premise that this paper attempts to give a discourse to the following questions:

1. Has the academic system of ranking students nationally helped shape the career destiny of students?
2. What have been the merits and demerits of academic rankings in the country?
3. Has the academic ranking tradition enhanced equity in education quality in the country?
4. What are some of the remedies to the identified bottlenecks in the academic ranking systems of students?

2. Merits of Academic Rankings

Academic rankings are an endeavor that is normally geared towards breaking down the performance of individual students, subjects and schools, a process that subsequently creates a clear cut stratification, in terms of high and low quality schools (Pusser & Marginson, 2013). In Kenya, for instance, we have renowned high quality schools such as Alliance High School, Alliance Girls High School, Kenya High School, Precious Blood Riruta, Mangu High School, Maseno School and so forth, where an admission of a student in those institutions is correlated to their academic excellence (Korir & Kipkemboi, 2014). In other words, according to the public's perspective, a student entry into such schools is a direct ticket to attaining good grades, and gain admission to the universities, where they undertake good courses that guarantees them a good life (Bainton, Barrett & Tikly, 2016). In a nutshell, therefore, curriculum examinations and rankings can be agonized as a sieve that separates chaff from wheat, bringing forth layers, that is, top performers who take high leadership positions that are accompanied with more critical and involving responsibilities; and low performers that take low skilled jobs, that entail less critical responsibilities (Rcragun, Deborahcragun & Piotrus, 2010).

Academic rankings have had its fair share of merits to its esteemed stakeholders including, the government, through the Ministry of Education, students, teachers and parents. First, it has provided one angle where the process of monitoring and evaluation can be conducted across all schools in the Republic upon the aftermath of national examination results release (Njiru, Karuku & Nyaga, 2020a). These findings are very instrumental in establishing teething problems that affect the successful implementation of the curriculum to the benefit of the students (Gbollie & Keamu, 2017). Through this monitoring and evaluation reports, it helps in providing information on the status of resource allocation vis-à-vis the school population, and help bring a discourse of whether they are sufficient or not (Xie & Zhang, 2020; Mulunga, 1987). This has been manifested by a wider disparity in academic performance between the so called city council or public, and private schools that is caused by their level of financial resources (Musau, 2017; Mang'eni, 2018; Sylvia & Orodho, 2014). For instance, it is a mockery that at this day and age, in the country, some schools lack electricity, have limited classrooms, as in some marginalized areas, students learn under a tree shade. This status quo has dampened any spirits of academic excellence leading to dismal performance in the national examinations (Republic of Kenya, 2018). This foregoing does not match their counterpart schools with sufficient resources that produce stunning performance on a yearly basis (Njiru, Karuku & Nyaga, 2020b).

Subject performance is also another important parameter to be looked at, considering their outcome have future impacts on different professions (Godana, Nkaabu & Rintari, 2019). This information helps concerned stakeholders in identifying the performance indicators of these subjects, that are majorly classified as mathematics and sciences, languages and technical subjects, and help provide timely remedies to the underperforming ones (Inyega, Ayaz, Naseem, Mahaya & Elsayed, 2021). In other words, this control mechanism is aimed at addressing future deficit of certain professionals in the nation building process; and general improvement of their socio economic status (Majgaard & Mingat, 2012). Among the teachers, it is difficult to gauge the quality of their work by school managers, as their quantity is pegged on drafted scheme of work, lesson notes and topics covered in a defined timeframe. Therefore, the measure of their respective principals in terms of achievement becomes an uphill task, and hence such national

examinations help solve that puzzle (Bennell & Akyeampong, 2007). In one way, the school managers, based on the performance can opt to do an internal re-adjustment for betterment of results or even seek for new reinforcements to up their performance.

These academic rankings also serve as an eye opener to the MOE, in terms of identifying the underperforming schools, and provide the way forward for their challenges (Njiru, Karuku & Nyaga, 2020b). Through the MOE field officers, they undertake inspection in line with the Education Act (2012), that states:

18(1) The Minister shall appoint officers with authority to enter and inspect any school, or any place at which it is reasonably suspected that a school is being conducted, at any time, with or without notice, and to report him with respect to the school or any aspect thereof ;
(2) The Minister shall appoint officers with authority to enter any school at any time, with or without notice, and inspect or audit the accounts of the school or advice the manager of the school on the maintenance of accounting records, and may temporarily remove any books or records, for the purpose of inspection or audit...

There has been a discourse surrounding schools lacking a serene learning environment and qualified teaching workforce. This foregoing has been directly correlated to the poor performance of such schools, more so, in the urban informal private schools (Ngware, 2013). In order to reduce the number of students whose future is destroyed by such schools, the MOE becomes instrumental in closing them down, as provided for by the Education Act (2012), which states that closure of unaided schools will be enforced if:

16(1) (b) It is a place in which efficient and suitable education or instruction is not being provided; (c) is being conducted or managed in a manner which is, in the opinion of the Minister, prejudicial to the physical, mental or moral welfare of the pupils of the school, or to peace, good order or good government in Kenya;(d) is a place in which a person is teaching who is not registered in the register of teachers kept under section 7 of the Teachers Service Commission Act (cap.212) (now repealed) and is not exempted under section 22 of that Act from registration...

Secondly, globally, academic rankings have been associated with the higher learning institutions such as universities (Tosun & Simsek, 2018). These rankings that are released per annum provide a breakdown of universities performance through what is popularly referred to as the ivy league table, with the process guided by a number of parameters, that include: the number of research publications per university/college, number of graduates employed in different sectors from a particular university, the availability of resources or facilities in a university and so forth (Sandström, 2016). These rankings are normally done with reputable firms that include: Quacquarelli Symonds (QS), Times Higher Education (THE), Webometrics, Academic Ranking World Universities (ARWU), Round University Ranking (RUR), The Center for World among others. These rankings mainly present the strengths and weaknesses of these institutions, in terms of the courses or programs they offer, and their general progress (Robinson, 2018). This thus helps the incoming students and concerned stakeholders to make an informed decision of where to pursue their studies (Doris, O'Neill & Sweetman, 2019). In our case, therefore, academic rankings at the secondary

level have been used as a marketing strategy, in order to increase student population which translates into bulging of their bank accounts (Thuo, 2020).

Parents play a pivotal role in tossing the coin on which school they prefer their children to go. In this case, with parents coming from different socio economic backgrounds, they tend to settle on the national academic performance and rankings as their point of reference (Njiru, Karuku & Nyaga, 2020b). In addition, this choice of school is influenced by the fact that parents and students are carried by the euphoria that school's academic performance influences self-esteem which directly has impacts on academic performance (Njiru, Karuku & Nyaga, 2020b). In other words, a student admitted to a poorly performing school is deemed to have failed in priori. For instance, according to a study that was done by Amunga, Amadalo and Maiyo (2010), it found that 22.6 percent of the respondents, mostly who constituted students were of the view that better performance and rankings in national examinations made them feel superior, while 17.5 percent of their counterparts were of the contrary opinion, that is, felt inferior. This thus implies that some students from low performing schools felt inferior and failed their examinations from the first day they were posted in their respective schools, which marked the end of the road for their success, influencing their attitude and morale which affects their overall performance (Murphy & Weinhardt, 2018).

Thirdly, academic results and rankings are pivotal in rewarding teachers through getting public recognition, enabling them to earn promotions or get internal rewards through the support of the parents-teachers association (PTA) and school board of management (BOM). Teaching profession has had its own share of challenges that include: poor remuneration leading to regular teachers' strikes, and lack of employment of new teachers to ease their present quantitative workload (Bennell & Akyeampong, 2007; Bainton, Barrett & Tikly, 2016). Therefore, academic results of individual teacher's subject serve as a cornerstone for creating a brand for either being poached by well-paying private schools, or increase the extra income through getting more students for private tuition (Bennell & Akyeampong, 2007). In the case of thousands of students that graduate with degrees in education, and have teachers service commission (TSC) numbers, serving in informal private schools, posting impressive results in their institutions gives them an opportunity to up their earnings, by getting good opportunities in well-established schools (Muchiri, 2012). This is due to the fact that teaching in these informal private schools can be termed as voluntary, where they earn a monthly stipend of less than 10,000 shillings (Sande, 2019). In a nutshell, therefore, this academic ranking of schools catalyzes the spirit of hard work, commitment and culture of competition among students and teachers, through setting up desired goals and means of achieving them within a defined timeframe (Muchiri, 2012).

Fourthly, most of the private schools particularly in urban informal settlements operate on limited funding, that can be manifested through the status of their infrastructure, number of staff personnel, and the nature of students that they admit (Sande, 2019; Mang'eni, 2018). This therefore implies that such schools run almost bankrupt, and depend on well-wishers to sustain their existence. In essence, most of these informal private schools are personal business entities, and thus their sustainability is subjected to the performance of their financial books, that is, profit or loss. Therefore, such kind of schools heavily relies upon the public perspective of trusting their children to enroll with them (Thuo, 2020). In an event that such schools produce good results, they also attract funding from non-state actors such as; nongovernmental

organizations (NGOs) and corporate institutions such as Safaricom, Equity Bank, Kenya Commercial Bank (KCB), betting firms such as Sportpesa, Lotto foundation, Kenya Power and Lighting Company (KPLC); that do corporate social responsibility (CSR) to communities across the country.

Fifth, academic outcomes and rankings are also instrumental in helping concerned stakeholders, such as the government to formulate appropriate measures that aide in resolving challenges faced in the sector (Abuya et al. 2015). These measures try to fill the existing loopholes with practical solutions, in order to ensure that the curriculum that is offered is of quality to the students, and for the production of qualified graduates (Abuya et al. 2015). In essence, due to increased competition and desire of most schools to attain public recognition out of academic excellence, examination irregularities has been so rampant, that has left the MOE to come up with a number of measures (Ndonga, 2016). They include school principals being the centre managers during Kenya Certificate of Secondary Education (KCSE) examinations for accountability purposes, use of transparent materials such as clipboards and geometrical sets, and schools closer to the containers holding examination papers being the last to pick them (Ndonga, 2016; Mutura, 2022).

3. Demerits of Academic Rankings

Academic examinations and rankings is a noble course that has coexisted since the establishment of formal education (Sandström, 2016). However, there have been an emerging discourse on its practical suitability to its learners, with a number of spectrums brought on the table such as; financial endowment, schools learning serenity, marginalization and stratification, quality of students admitted, the size of the teaching staff and the availability and status of infrastructures available in the schools (Korir & Kipkemboi, 2014). Schools are thus abled differently, and persons of divergent view hold that subjecting all schools to these rankings, without factoring in the aforementioned parameters is exercise in futility that is subjective and that alienates non performing schools and students (Musau, 2017). There have been a number of negative connotations that have been associated with the tradition of academic rankings in national examinations in the country.

First, is the culture of examination malpractices (Njiru, Karuku & Nyaga, 2020b). National examinations have been touted by the public as the defining factor for individual's life in terms of doing good courses in higher education and landing good jobs that translates into good income (Robinson, 2018). This position has put a lot of pressure on students and teachers for academic success, leaving them with no option but to collude with examination officials in order to get favourable results (Njiru, Karuku & Nyaga, 2020b). This notion of favourable results has brought the aspect of teaching and drilling students only on examinable subjects (Amunga, Amadalo & Maiyo, 2010). This has resulted into producing students that have difficulties in fitting into the society due to lack of life skills. This further shows student that are rigid towards embracing change due to lack of creativeness and assertiveness. This thus leaves the curriculum to be diluted and not of benefit to its recipients for not achieving its defined objectives (Republic of Kenya, 2018). In fact, according to Rcragun, Deborahcragun & Piotrus (2010), they ask a very fundamental question, when is grade A really a C?

The inability of answering such kind of a question raises a red flag towards the quality and credibility of the national examinations administered. For instance, in the year 2021, the Kenya National Examinations

Council (KNEC) cancelled examination results for 411 students who sat for their KCSE, while the teachers service commission (TSC) interdicted 60 teachers for being involved in examination irregularities which is against their professional code of conduct (Muchira, 2022). Examination malpractices are a chained process that also involves paying money to the persons involved in leaking the examinations before they are officially done. This thus brings in the aspect of inequality and unfairness towards students from low socio economic backgrounds that are unable to make such payments. This thus demonstrates that subjecting all students to the same examinations, with others having added advantage will be an exercise in futility, considering that it does not produce the true picture or academic abilities of students.

Secondly, is the socio economic challenge of schools (Xie & Zhang, 2020). This entails the financial resources of the schools, the family background of students, and the overall school environment in relations to the learning environment (Xie & Zhang, 2020). In terms of a student's background, respective parents with higher education enhanced their children to do much better in national examinations (Rugutt & Chemosit, 2005). This is attributed to the fact that they understand the importance of education, having gone through the system, and knowing the significant relationship that exists between attaining good education and increased lifetime financial resources (Doris, O'Neill & Sweetman, 2019). In essence, therefore, students from high socio economic families are admitted in schools that those of their counterparts from low socio economic status cannot afford, leading to a wider disparity in academic performance (Xie & Zhang, 2020). This is attributed to the low motivation levels of teachers from low performing schools that are dilapidated and characterized by poor learning environment, poor remuneration and high teacher turn over (Korir & Kipkemboi, 2014). This is exhibited through a study that was conducted by Korir and Kipkemboi (2014) that found that there was poor preparation of students for the national examinations, with a whopping 42 percent of teachers being unable to give home assignments or even be consulted by their respective students. This thus serves as a disservice to the students in the quest to perform well in examinations, thus causing a disadvantage to them during the academic rankings (Husbands & Pearce, 2012; Nyamoita & Otieno, 2016).

Thirdly, is the aspect of a weakened curriculum. An effective and productive curriculum is one that molds students holistically, in readiness to venturing into different spheres in the nations development process (Godana, Nkaabu & Rintari, 2019; Bainton, Barrett & Tikly, 2016). However, our curriculum has been receiving much critique for tilting towards academic excellence at the expense of other inner abilities of student's talents (Bainton, Barrett & Tikly, 2016; Gbollie & Keamu, 2017). In an ideal effective curriculum delivery and academic rankings, a number of tenets ought to be put into considerations that include:

1. The individual student's talents or co-curricular activities such as in sports, music, theatre and film, hospitality and so forth. In doing so, ranking students in the mentioned co-curricular activities in addition to the academic front will enable all students to feel that their contributions are all valued to the society (Amutabi, 2019). In addition, this kind of gesture will help in addressing cases of deviant behaviours among students in preparation of national examinations such as burning of school dormitories.
2. Academic performance-This kind of assessment tests individuals depth and breadth in their understanding and comprehension of the examinable subjects taught in class and an overall grade

given to them (Dahmen, 2019). The outcome of this process is aimed at enabling those that obtain good grades to join universities and colleges to pursue courses of their choice, while those with low grades join the technical and vocational training institutions in order to obtain technical and practical skills (Kosgei, 2020).

3. **Problem solving Skills-Education** is a process that is geared towards producing problem solvers that can help in providing solutions to various challenges within the society (Bainton, Barrett & Tikly, 2016). In this case, therefore, students are subjected to various case scenarios, and their abilities to make informed choices and decisions gauged. This helps in sharpening creativity and innovation among the students, whose new ideas also help in providing solutions to any existing gap in a particular field (Bainton, Barrett & Tikly, 2016).
4. **Interpersonal and communication Abilities**-There has been a growing concern about the number of students who have the challenge of reading and writing. This foregoing inhibits the affected student from progressing further, since communication abilities play a pivotal role in marketing oneself to opportunities availed to them and generally expressing themselves (Zubairi & Rose, 2019). This therefore implies that continuous concentration on academic excellence, without looking at this aspect of interpersonal and communication abilities will leave the student helpless in trying to find fit in the society.

Teachers play a cardinal role in being the custodians of the curriculum and passing it to the students (Mang'eni, 2018). This implies that the overall achievement of the curriculum is pegged on the teachers' competency and effective delivery methods (Njiru, Karuku & Nyaga, 2020b). Unfortunately, the country has been facing a serious shortage of teachers especially in the marginalized regions such as arid and semi-arid areas, rural areas and urban informal settlements that are deemed to be hardship areas, thus most qualified teachers tend to turn down offers from such regions (Korir & Kipkemboi, 2014). This has thus left those positions to be taken by persons who lack teacher training thus compromising on the quality of teaching that takes place in such classes. These shortcomings have been translated to the higher education where, as every student jostles to get limited opportunities in the university through examination malpractices, the graduates' certificates are considered diluted, 'half baked' due to lack of essential skills to take on their assignments in their respective employer's firms (Amunga, Amadalo & Maiyo, 2010). This is a position that is supported by Musau (2017), who opines that, education quality in the country and Africa as a whole is at its death bed, since much emphasis is placed on the quantitative aspect as opposed to the qualitative part. The curriculum is also weakened through much attention being focused on academic rankings as opposed to extensive and effective coverage of the syllabus, all in the quest of obtaining public recognition (Robinson, 2018; Husbands & Pearce, 2012). Increased work overload among teachers has also contributed to weakening the quality of the curriculum. This is manifested through increased teacher to student ratio of 1:70 which minimizes their contact for the desired outcomes (Bennell & Akyeampong, 2007; Wairimu, 2016; Wanjohi, 2010).

The issue of teachers' remuneration has been a teething problem that has to a certain magnitude compromised on the quality of curriculum delivery by teachers (Bennell & Akyeampong, 2007). This has been witnessed through regular industrial actions by teachers for their improved pay. Teachers have in turn ventured into doing extra or part time jobs in order to supplement their end month salaries (Bennell & Akyeampong, 2007). An example is the private tuitions and remedial classes, which poses lethargy on

teachers to deliver during their normal classes, as their allegiance shifts to where they get good payment (Njiru, Karuku & Nyaga, 2020a). This results into potential unprofessional working culture of teachers' absenteeism, in their quest to get more clients and income. This is a challenge that is mostly experienced in urban informal private schools, which in turn affects the overall preparation and performance of their students.

Fourth, having an objective academic ranking in the county can be considered as a mirage due to the existing discrepancies between schools based on the financial status, size and quality of the workforce, and the student's family backgrounds (Akala, 2021). Therefore, the existing ranking system can be termed as unfair, more so, on the poorly funded schools that cannot cope with the existing competition (Xie & Zhang, 2020). In such cases, having a student from these low funded schools appear among the top cream is unthinkable, and if it happens, it is considered a miracle. There has been the challenge of certain schools having poor infrastructure to house any meaningful and quality learning (Rugutt & Chemosit, 2005). In essence, some schools more so, the urban informal private schools are made of mud, corrugated iron sheets and wood, whose ambience to student concentration in class is poor due to cases of noise pollution and hostile weather conditions such as extreme rainfall and sun (Harry, 2016). This is a menace that has also been exhibited by a study that was conducted in West Pokot by Mang'eni (2018), which found the schools had pathetic infrastructures that made the students to be highly susceptible to health challenges such as jiggers. This therefore implies that ranking such students with their counterparts in major towns and cities is incomparable.

Limited funding has also affected the procurement and human resource operations, in terms of getting the requisite teaching aides and hiring of new teachers to reduce the workload challenges (Akala, 2021). The non-recognition of co-curricular subjects or lessons such as life skills, physical education, pastoral program, guidance and counseling has lowered the self-esteem of both students and teachers who have the expertise in these areas (Njiru, Karuku & Nyaga, 2020b). This thus raises important questions; (1) where will teachers trained in co-curricular subjects be posted if all teachers are pro teaching the examinable subjects only? (2) Will students consider the co-curricular subjects as important or meant to pass time?

It is the position of this paper that the aforementioned factors have not been factored in the ranking system. There has also been the challenge of high teacher turn over that has been triggered by poor remuneration, and teachers choosing urban and good performing schools as opposed to the contrary, in order to build their reputation (Amunga, Amadalo & Maiyo, 2010). This has resulted to the marginalization of low performing schools that have suffered the wrath of limited staffs that has in turn dealt a blow to their performance (Nyamoita & Otieno, 2016). In summation, therefore, our academic system has both internal and external ranking system. Internal rankings are done at individual school levels, which if not done in the right way risks producing the "Big fish in a small pond" syndrome (Fang, Huang, Zhang, Huang, Li & Yuan, 2018). This syndrome implies that a student posting good results in internal examinations can paint a different picture by scoring poorly in external national examinations.

4. Pointers to the Existing Gaps in Attainment of Education Success

One, despite the government's effort to increase school enrolment rates, reports claim that there are still a lot of children out of school (Wanjohi, 2010). Some of the reasons for not being in school include; lack of

financial resources to buy school uniforms, stationaries, school fees and basic life necessities such as food, shelter and clothing. This has been witnessed by students, some of whom are over aged and guardians to themselves establish absenteeism culture to attend to their jobs, in order to earn an income. There has been the existing inequality in resource allocation in terms of different types of schools that has directly impacted their national examination performance (Wanjohi, 2010). This is a problem that has percolated to the teachers' workforce who has suffered the challenge of work overload, poor working environment, low remuneration and regular industrial action.

Two, there has been an existing gap that has been triggered by lack of capacity building, collegiality among teachers in and without their respective schools, in availability of short professional development courses to further sharpen their prowess to the ever changing dynamics of education/curriculum hence rely on what they learnt in colleges. There is also lack of academic exchange programs of teachers in different schools that enhances similar teaching methodologies that correlates to improved academic output.

Three, there still persists the problem of deviant behaviour among students that have negatively influenced their academic output such as drugs and substance abuse, early sexual debut that has led to teenage pregnancies and school drop outs and so forth.

Four, there is a fault in school administration, and an effective partnership between teachers, parents, students and board of management has been a missing link in some of the low performing schools thus the need to address them in order to combat cases of student indiscipline.

Five, there is laxity on the side of the MOE field officers, in terms of monitoring and evaluation, as schools that have poor learning conditions continue to operate posting poor grades.

5. So what are the Probable Remedies?

Thus far, it is important to reiterate that assessments in the world of academia are important in highlighting the depth of students understanding of the work covered (Mogapi, 2016). Further, academic assessments help in unearthing outcomes that cannot be phenotypically established such as student's level of perception, knowledge and attitude towards a particular subject (Rugutt & Chemosit, 2005). One, it is the position of this paper that, either the existing academic ranking be improved to achieve its desired objectives or embrace the newly established competency based curriculum (CBC) to the latter. The past rankings have heavily relied on students with university entry grades, that is, grade A to C+ (plus), not laying much emphasis on those with grade C plain way below to E, that form the bulk majority. Unfortunately, these bulk majority students are left with the tag of "failures" or persons fit in the juakali (literary meaning hot sun), an industry that requires less professional experience, as it is a hands on endeavor (UNESCO, 1998). This culture of not appreciating the place of technical and vocational training institutions, and celebrating universities is our major undoing. An example is in 2020, when a lot of eyebrows were raised when a total of 15,547 students that scored university entry grades opted to enroll in technical and vocational institutions (Igadwah, 2020). This was precipitated by skewed employment opportunities for university graduates, as opposed to the hands on sector (Igadwah, 2020).

To attain academic rankings objectives in the country, therefore, it is imperative for all areas covered in the process ranging from classwork, co-curricular activities, technical and innovative abilities of the

students be factored in to ensure all students feel that the system within the society is favourable (Mogapi, 2016). This is the ideal society that Robert Merton in his Theory of Anomie describes as a harmonious integration of cultural defined goals and institutional means by which goals are achieved, that produces a well-functioning society (Deflem, 2017). In other words, a well-functioning society implies that, there is a clear division of labour and expertise, with competence and hard work embraced in individuals preferred area of work. The second option is that of fully embracing the newly established competency based curriculum (CBC). Its establishment aims at addressing the inadequacies that has been leveled against the 8-4-4 system that has been deemed as more theoretical, that lacks practicality, which has been more of examination oriented as opposed to holistically covering the syllabus with students (Zamir, 2020). This is a premise that has been supported by employers, who feel that the graduates released in the job market have limited skills, hence invest a lot of financial resources in training them (Lelei & Weidman, 2012). The approach taken by CBC is commendable, as it focuses on engaging the student in all critical stages of learning, that is, identifying and conceptualization of a concept, discussions and practicality, a process that produces a creative and problem solver individual (Inyega, Ayaz, Naseem, Mahaya & Elsayed, 2021). This education system helps in removing the rote learning that has manifested over the years through vices such as examination cheating to post good grades for public recognition (Amutabi, 2019).

CBC also helps in easing the academic pressure and self-esteem that is brought about by the national rankings, as the focus has now shifted to the individual student abilities (Amutabi, 2019). In a nutshell, therefore, CBC will be essential in motivating learners through employing experiential learning methodologies (Haahr, Nielsen, Hansen & Jakobsen, 2005). Further, the curriculum motivates students in the following ways:

1. It enhances a vibrant co-curricular program, whose subjects are examined and graded, thus sending a clear signal to students that they are significant areas of study.
2. It enhances fairness and equity to all students in terms of academic assessments, as they are examined in terms of their understanding of what they have interacted with vis-à-vis their resource allocation. In other words, enhancing sufficient resources to schools to facilitate technical subjects such as music, home science, agriculture, arts, sports and theatre, it will enhance the tapping of talents at a tender age and help perfect, market and even earn scholarship beyond our borders. In the local scene, the above mentioned fields can also open more employment opportunities to many Kenyans, which in the long run will help in addressing the challenge of unemployment.
3. It also helps culcate the spirit of self-initiative, team work and perfects interpersonal skills that allow them to swiftly fit in all spheres of the society.

The success of CBC is also going to be pegged on the level of its funding (Amunga, Were & Ashioya, 2020). Adequate finances should be pumped into building more infrastructure, buying teaching materials, hiring and training of teachers (Amunga, Were & Ashioya, 2020). In essence, teachers already in service were trained in colleges and universities, to a totally different curriculum, hence ought to cope up with these new changes, through undergoing in service training. This approach will help in addressing the issue of quality of the graduates that have undergone through the system. Education as a sector is one that thrives through a solid partnership of different stakeholders such as teachers, parents, students, government, sponsors and so forth. If we single out parents, they play an instrumental role in doing assignments with

their children in this CBC program (Mwenje, 2020). Therefore, despite of parents emerging complains of lack of time to do so, sensitizing them and changing their mindset on the matter is important in the overall success rate of CBC.

Secondly, the monitoring and evaluation department in the MOE should be given more funding to enable it fulfill its mandate on a timely basis (Amunga, Were & Ashioya, 2020). Monitoring and evaluation helps in providing critical information in terms of transparency and accountability, decision making and acts as a point of reference to future assessment processes. School heads should thus invest in both internal and external evaluators, in order to improve on the quality of respective teachers work output (Muchiri, 2012).

Thirdly, leadership in learning institutions is key towards achieving its desired expectations. The concept of leadership is one that has been defined variously by scholars. According to Beal (2017), a leader is a person tasked with commanding, guiding and providing direction in the quest of achieving common goals within a group. Conner (1968) defines leadership as the ability to help a group make decisions and act upon them. Thatcher (1966) on the other hand defines leadership as an attempt to influence behaviour of other people or an art of influencing others through persuasion and guidance. Leadership therefore can be summed as one that appreciates a person in charge being first among equals, and that one ought to be a servant and not bossy on peers for harmony in a team. School heads or principals ought to bring on board other teachers in terms of penning down their institutions short, medium and long term goals (Nyagosia, 2011). This helps bring the aspect of collegiality among the staff that enables the teaching staff to be satisfied, which develops a positive learning environment that enhances good scholarship (Nyagosia, 2011). In essence, therefore, leadership style is key towards attracting positive academic performance (Godana, Nkaabu & Rintari, 2019).

Fourth, school principals should also devise ways in which they can supplement what they are getting from the national government, through engaging with other stakeholders such as local banks and companies, nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) and civil societies that engage in corporate social responsibilities (CSR) (Zubairi & Rose, 2019). This endeavor will help in uplifting the low funded schools, and also give students from low socio economic background an equal chance to quality education. This initiative will be important in uplifting dilapidated schools more so, in the urban informal settlements and marginalized areas such as the arid and semi-arid lands, and disaster prone areas in terms of war. In addition, the introduction of the CBC education system is one that requires heavy financial investment for infrastructure and teaching materials. This status quo in the government through the MOE's budget is that, it heavily delves on expenditure as opposed to development (Ngware, 2019). This therefore implies that the corroboration of other stakeholders in institutions will help in filling the gap of inadequate funding.

Fifth, another teething problem in the education success of most secondary schools has been poor remuneration, which has resulted to increased teacher's turnover, and high attrition rates to join other employment opportunities (Mugho, 2017). Therefore, much effort should aim at striving to implement good remuneration and incentives to teachers (Bennell & Akyeampong, 2007). Some of the incentives include giving teachers hardship allowances, annual leave and allowing teachers to work in stations where they are closer to their respective families. In addition, teachers' proper remuneration also correlates to teachers' ability to advance them professionally, through going back to college (Bennell & Akyeampong, 2007). This helps in the overall quality improvement of the curriculum delivered.

Sixth, the family is an instrumental institution within a given society, as it is the one that produces these students, for the sake of this paper. Students come from diverse families, with their respective families having parents with diverse educational background. This therefore implies that for all parents within a school to read from the same script, it is imperative that they be sensitized in terms of their place in their children's education process (Haahr, Nielsen, Hansen & Jakobsen, 2005; African Union, 2016). Research has shown that families that are advantaged economically translate into their children posting good results as compared to their counterparts from low socio economic background (Rugutt & Chemosit, 2005). In addition, proper advocacy and awareness campaigns should be conducted within communities, in order to ease the pressure set on students excelling in academia by accommodating other key areas in sports, entertainment among others.

6. Conclusion

To this tail end, it is no doubt that education is an important resource that an individual can possess in a given society. Educational levels of individual members within a society serves as a common denominator that projects how sectors such as economy, technology, human resource, political, social, information and communication technology (ICT) will fare. In essence, the existing global stratification of countries, in terms of developed and least developed is pegged on education of its population. Developed countries such as United States, Britain and Canada et cetera have sophisticated education system, as opposed to developing countries in Africa, Asia and South America that have comparatively low quality education. This therefore leads us to the discourse of quality vis-à-vis quantity of the education system. This paper holds that, as a country, we have done well quantitatively, through increased enrolments of students to secondary level of education. This is majorly caused by the government's introduction of universal free primary education in 2003 to date. However, there is still room for improvement of its quality to the better release of competent human labour to the job market. As the country acquaints itself to the introduction of CBC, it is imperative for all stakeholders to fully participate in its implementation, in order to ensure that it benefits the learners, as opposed to the 8-4-4 education system that has received a lot of critique from scholars and employers. It is based on the above foregoing that this paper makes the following findings: One, there has been cases of massive disparity in terms of allocation of staff personnel, finances and infrastructure that has enhanced social stratification in terms of national, extra county, county, sub county and private schools. Two, there has been the rise of examination malpractices such as cheating for excellence purposes, that has diluted the quality of curriculum delivery among teachers who are its custodians.

7. Recommendations

It is therefore based on the above findings that the following recommendations are made:

One, more research and financial inputs should be done on this education sector more so, on the CBC to improve it even further, as it is the way to salvage our education curriculum.

Two, concerned stakeholders should cherish the spirit of exchange programs among school teachers to eliminate the culture of competition that grows seeds of polarization and individualism.

Three, the family, and in particular the parents play an instrumental role in the education sector hence ought to be incorporated in most of its critical implementation stages.

Four, the education sector performance lies in the availability of funding; hence a lot of resources should be invested in this area, as this has been the major huddle in its operations.

Five, it is necessary for the review of teachers training curriculum at the college and university level to be in line with the new CBC education system.

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