

## **ABSTRACT**

Even after developing a sector-wise approach to manage education in Kenya, indicators still shows that the quality of primary education is still poor. Unless urgent measures are taken to address these challenges, quality of education is bound to degenerate, thus jeopardizing the country's development goals. Following the UNESCO framework for analyzing quality in education, this study purposely analyses Kenya's primary education in relation to the access and participation of orphans and vulnerable children (OVC). OVC are persons under the age of 18 years who have lost one parent (maternal or paternal orphans) or both (double orphans) through death caused by AIDS or any other circumstances. The overall objective of this study therefore was to investigate the extent of access and participation of OVC in Free Primary Education (FPE) in public schools in Kobala Location Kendu Bay Division in Rachuonyo District. Upon reviewing relevant literature on national and international practices of providing access and participation, some lessons for Kenya are drawn. Literature reviewed indicates that the number of orphans is increasing rapidly in this country and that HIV/AIDS is the main cause of this crisis. Further, it is estimated that 40 million people worldwide are living with HIV/AIDS (AED, 2004). Although Sub-Saharan Africa accounts for only 10.4% of the world population, it accounts for 71.3% of all HIV infections and 78.6% of AIDS orphans in the world AED, 2004). The introduction of FPE in 2003 opened doors to millions of Kenyan children who would otherwise be out of school today. It was therefore seen as a blessing to the many orphans in our communities. Reports however show that the initiative may not address special needs of OVC. The methodology used was a survey design. A sample was made of 10 public primary schools out of a total of 13. This was done using simple random and purposeful sampling methods to ensure that each of the 3 sub-divisions of Kobala location was represented. The study used a self-administered questionnaire to gather data from respondents, fill-in observation guide forms and informal interview. SPSS software was used with the help of a computer expert to analyse the data using statistical techniques such as frequencies and percentages. The challenges faced in providing FPE to OVC according to findings include amongst others; inadequate learning materials, lack of psychosocial support by schools particularly due to bigger pupil population in classes and provision of basic needs like food and school uniforms. Amongst the recommendations made include enhancing access to FPE by ave. There still a big number of OVC who still cannot enroll in schools despite due a number of barriers such as lack of food, school uniforms and shelter. This is particularly associated with child labourers. The Ministries of Education and Culture Social Services should collaborate in order to ensure that these needs are made available to identified OVC. There participation in schools could also be enhanced activities that promote psychosocial wellbeing of OVC.