



**Consortium for Research on
Educational Access,
Transitions and Equity**

**A Preliminary Note on Kenya Primary School Enrolment
Trends over Four Decades**

Anthony Somerset

**CREATE PATHWAYS TO ACCESS
Research Monograph No 9**

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Consortium for Research on
Educational Access, Transitions & Equity

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List of Acronyms

CBS	Central Bureau of Statistics
CPE	Certificate of Primary Education
GER	Gross Enrolment Ratio
GPI	Gender Parity Index
KCPE	Kenya Certificate of Primary Education
KNEC	Kenya National Examination Council
PTR	Pupil-to-Teacher Ratio
UPE	Universal Primary Education

Preface

Ambitions to universalise primary enrolments are not new in many Sub Saharan African countries. In too many cases progress since independence has stalled and the gains made in the 1960s and 1970s have been lost. Most recently Education for All has added a new impetus to the push to improve access to education for Africa's children. This review analyses historic data from Kenya to explore fluctuating enrolment patterns over four decades. It uncovers some of the dynamics of systems in transition and illustrates how policy interventions can have an uneven impact over time on improved participation. Critically periods of high growth are often followed by reversion to underlying long term trends, gains in initial enrolment are not always accompanied by gains throughout all the grades in the primary cycle, and patterns of gains in participation can vary for different groups. This study adds to insights into how policy has an impact on access, and acts as a reminder that historic trends may repeat themselves as the Education for All agenda is implemented.

Professor Keith Lewin
Director of CREATE

A Preliminary Note on Kenya Primary School Enrolment Trends over Four Decades

1. Introduction

1.1 Education in Kenya

At the time of Kenya's Independence in late 1963, the development of the education system stood high on the agenda of the incoming Government. Mounting evidence of the transformation education was bringing about in the lives of those few Africans who had been fortunate enough to receive it was leading to escalating social demand; while at the same time belief in the power of education to promote economic and social progress was running strong, among politicians, planners, and providers alike. Less than a week after the Independence celebrations were over, the Minister of Education appointed a commission to review all aspects of the education system, and shortly afterwards Jomo Kenyatta, the first President, launched the Harambee (self-help) initiative, which challenged local communities to undertake the herculean task of building, equipping and staffing secondary schools in areas where government provision was lacking.

The education system the new Government inherited from the outgoing colonial regime was stratified along racial lines. Separate schools were provided for pupils of European, Asian, Arab and African origin;¹ and furthermore, an altogether disproportionate share of public resources had been devoted to the schools reserved for the more privileged groups:

(African education) has always been the residuary legatee of the nation's wealth. During the ten years before Independence, more capital was invested in European and Asian education, representing 3% of the population, than in the education of the African 97%. (Kenya Government, 1964:21).

In 1963, only about 840,000 African children were attending elementary school; less than 35% of the estimated age group. At the secondary level, access was severely restricted by a highly-competitive examination barrier. Total African enrolment in the handful of secondary schools available to them amounted to only 10,593, representing just 1.3% of the estimated age group. In stark contrast, the comparable figure for European enrolment stood at 98.9% (Sheffield, 1971).

This note presents a preliminary account of the changes in Kenya's primary school enrolment patterns which have taken place during the four decades which have passed since the first Independence years. The data have come from a variety of sources:

¹ There were, however, a few exceptions, the most notable being Hospital Hill, a partly-aided primary school established initially in the grounds of Government House, Nairobi in the mid-1950s. Hospital Hill selected its intake on the basis of a three-way ethnic quota, shared equally among Europeans, Asians and Africans. This policy was followed until the mid-1970s, when demand for places from Europeans and Asians fell away.

Ministry of Education summary reports for the years 1964 to 1973, Central Bureau of Statistics (CBS) computer printout for 1974 to 1979, and summary statistics from the annual Kenya Economic Survey for the years since 1980. Consistency checks have been applied whenever more than one data source was available. When discrepancies were found the later source was preferred, except in a few cases where there were obvious typological errors.

Estimates of school-age populations are based on reports from the four censuses conducted since Independence, starting in 1969 and continuing at ten-year intervals through to 1999. However the data are problematic in several respects, two of them especially relevant to the calculation of Gross Enrolment Rates (GERs):

1. Under-enumeration. Several census reports present evidence of population under-enumeration, especially among young people of school age. A Compendium to the 1979 Census gives a particularly frank account:

It is . . . thought that the under-enumeration in 1979 was particularly serious in Nyanza Province. . . . In Nyanza the shortfall of the enumerated children under 10 on the projected (number) is. . .of the order of 26%. . . .Some rough calculations suggest that a total of some 300,000 persons may have been missed in Nyanza Province, of whom some two-thirds were children under 10. In the rest of the country a further 450,000 children may have been omitted. (Republic of Kenya, Central Bureau of Statistics, 1981:13)

Doubtless the lessons learned from the 1979 experience have led to the development of more effective approaches to information-gathering and validation, and hence to more accurate population counts. But given the explosive growth in Kenya's total population since that date – from a reported 15.33 million in 1979 to 28.69 million in 1999 – it seems unlikely that the problems of ensuring comprehensive population coverage have yet been fully resolved.

2. 'Clumping' of reported ages. Given the lack of a comprehensive birth registration system, it is not surprising that many Kenyans do not know their chronological ages with any accuracy, and thus give approximate values when providing information to Census enumerators. Figure 1 graphs the distribution of reported ages for young people aged 5 to 19 in the Censuses of 1979, 1989 and 1999.

1.2 Enumerated population by age, Kenya census 1979, 1989 and 1999.

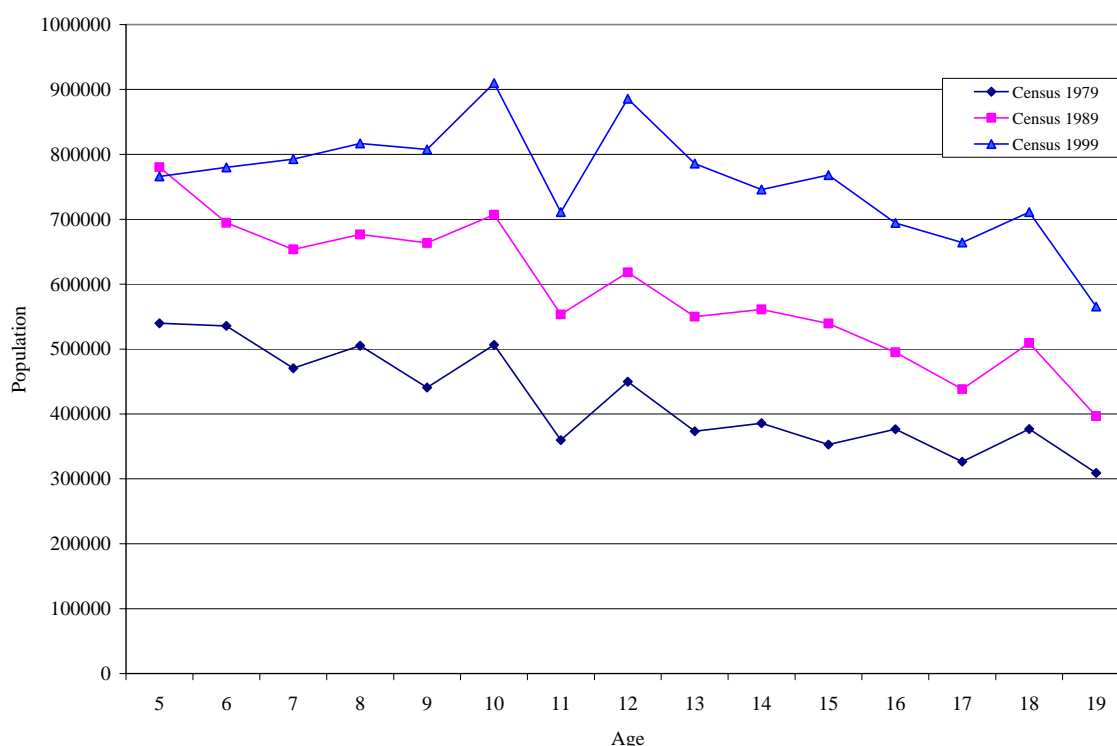
Marked 'clumping' of reported ages is evident in all three censuses, but the patterns have changed over time. In the 1979 census, age 10 was the most strongly preferred, followed by 12 and 18. With the exception of age 6, all other even-numbered ages were also chosen more often than adjacent odd-numbered ages, giving the graph a saw-tooth shape. Age 11 was especially unpopular, while age 15, despite being a 'rounding' number, was chosen less often than 14 and 16 to either side.²

² For reasons which are obscure, the saw-tooth pattern was much more pronounced in Nyanza and Rift Valley provinces than in the adjacent Western Province, and also in Eastern and Coast provinces.

Twenty years later in 1999 ages 10 and 12 were still strongly favoured and age 11 was still very unpopular, but in other parts of the distribution the preference for even-numbered years had disappeared. The ‘rounding’ number 15 was now preferred to the adjacent even numbers 14 and 16.

Clumping does not present major difficulties to the estimation of school-age populations over extended time spans, the 6 - 12 primary age group, for instance, but becomes a concern when estimates of age groups for particular school grades are needed. The problem has been tackled by estimating from three-year running averages: the six-year age group, for example, is estimated from the average of the five- six-, and seven-year totals.

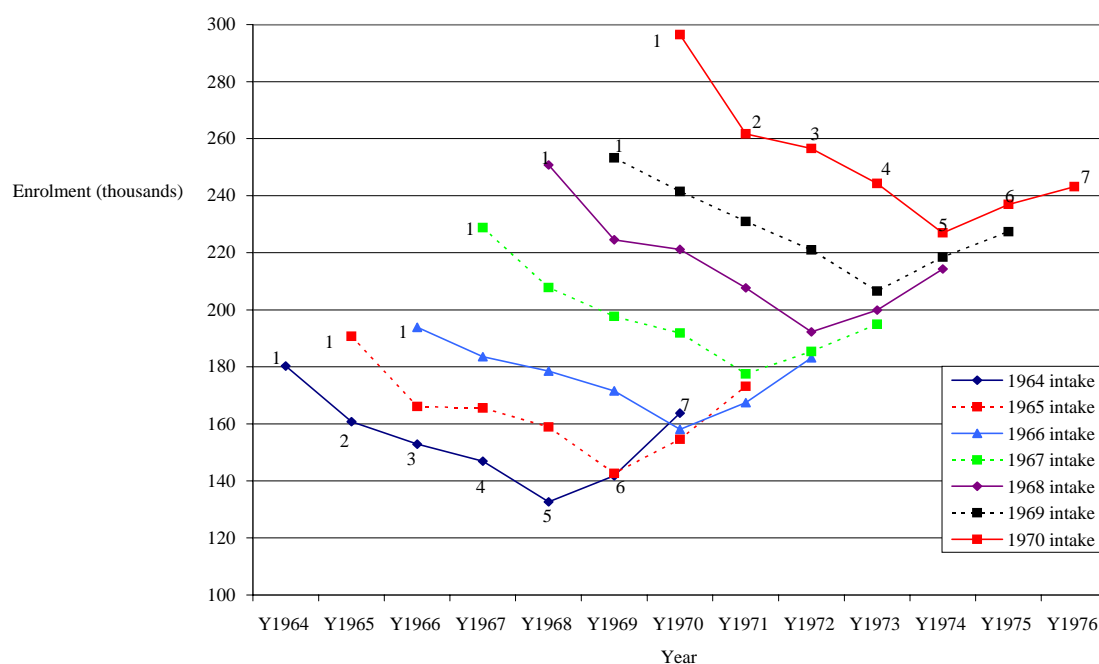
Figure 1 Enumerated Population by Age, Kenya Census 1979, 1989 and 1999.



2. Cohort Survival Curves, 1964 to 2003

Figures 2 to 7 show cohort survival curves for Kenya primary Grade 1 classes from 1964 to 2003. They are constructed by linking the reported Grade 1 enrolment in a given year with the Grade 2 enrolment in the following year, and so on through to the final grade of the primary sequence (Grade 7 until 1985, Grade 8 thereafter).

Figure 2 Kenya Primary School Cohort Survival Curves, Grade 1 Intakes, 1964 to 1970



It will not need stressing that these graphs are not in fact true cohort survival curves. Any attempt to build up a longitudinal picture of progress through a school system from cross-sectional enrolment data is necessarily flawed. The curves are shaped not only by dropout, but also by repetition; and further, by pupils resuming their education after a period away from school. Unfortunately, however, cross-sectional data is the only data available to us, at least at the national level. A true cohort analysis involves identifying a group of young people entering Grade 1 for the first time in a particular year, and following them through until all have either graduated from the final grade or else left school permanently. Clearly such an exercise is feasible only at the micro-level, and to a team with the resources to re-visit the field at intervals over an extended time period.³

Over the 40-year sequence, the enrolment patterns have alternated between periods of relative stability and periods of sudden change; the changes always consequent on one or more major Government initiatives. The breaks between the six charts are

³ A second-best alternative is to start from the Grade 1 register for the year when the majority of the current final-year pupils were starting their schooling, and then to reconstruct the educational histories of each child listed through subsequent school records, and through interviews with the survivors.

arranged to coincide, where possible, to these sudden changes. To provide continuity, the final cohort curve from each chart is repeated in the following chart.

Between 1964 and 1970, primary Grade 1 intakes rose steadily, from about 180,000 in the former year to 296,000 in the latter, an average increase of about 20,000 per annum. Subsequent to the Grade 1 year, enrolments in each cohort dropped to Grade 5, then rose again in the final two grades. Thus the cohort curves are all of an asymmetrical U-shape, with the low point always in Grade 5. Apparent losses in enrolment between Grades 1 and 5 were typically of the order of 20-30%, with about one-quarter to one-half of these losses recovered by Grade 7.

Calculating from the 1969 Census data, the 1970 age six (Grade 1) population age group can be estimated at 375,000, giving a Grade 1 Gross Enrolment Rate (GER) of 79 for that year, while for the same cohort five years later the Grade 5 GER was 60. However if, as seems likely, there was significant under-enumeration in the 1969 census, then both GERs may well be underestimates by a considerable margin.

A downward-sloping cohort curve between two school grades is of course generally an indicator of dropout, but more frequent repetition in the earlier grade can also contribute. Conversely an upward-sloping curve usually indicates increased repetition in the higher grade, although policy measures which encourage substantial numbers of previous dropouts to re-enter school can also lead to an upturn.

Unfortunately repetition rates are at present available for the years 1974 to 1978 only. Summary data are shown in Table 1.

Table 1 Percentage of Repeaters in Kenya Primary School Enrolments, 1974 to 1978.

Grade	1974	1975	1976	1977	1978
Gr 1	2.02%	4.53%	5.56%	5.81%	6.17%
Gr 2	4.01%	3.04%	5.23%	6.06%	5.94%
Gr 3	4.63%	4.27%	3.92%	5.76%	6.27%
Gr 4	5.54%	4.75%	5.23%	4.70%	5.96%
Gr 5	4.88%	4.43%	4.86%	5.20%	5.03%
Gr 6	6.94%	6.78%	6.24%	6.57%	7.55%
Gr 7	15.85%	15.56%	14.29%	9.54%	12.32%
Average, all grades	4.81%	5.19%	5.84%	5.95%	6.63%

It can be seen that in all five years, without exception, repetition rates in the final grade (Grade 7) were much higher than in any other grade. They ranged from 9.54% in 1977 to 15.85% in 1974. Grade 6 repetition rates were also above-average in all years, although by much smaller margins. By comparison repetition rates in the junior and middle grades were low; generally of the order of 3-5%. Repetition in Grade 1 was, in general, no more frequent than in the later grades.

In the group which entered Grade 1 in 1970 (the final group plotted in Figure 1), increased repetition between Grade 5 (1974) and Grade 7 (1976), combined with low dropout rates, account for the upturn in the cohort survival curve over the last two grades. Total enrolments rose from 227,600 in Grade 5 to 243,400 in Grade 7, an increase of 15,800; but over the same period the number of repeaters jumped from 11,100 to 34,800, an increase of 23,700. If we make the assumption (not always justified) that changes in cohort numbers from year to year are influenced solely by dropout and by changes in repetition, we can estimate that dropout in this cohort over the final two years of the primary course (Grade 5 to 7) amounted to only about 8,000 pupils.

The fragmentary data available for the previous cohort (the 1969 Grade 1 intake) confirm these patterns. The total enrolment for this cohort rose by 8,400 between from 219,000 in Grade 6 (1974) to 227,400 in Grade 7 (1975), while the number of repeaters increased from 15,200 to 35,400. Estimated dropout between Grade 6 and 7 was a modest 11,800 pupils.

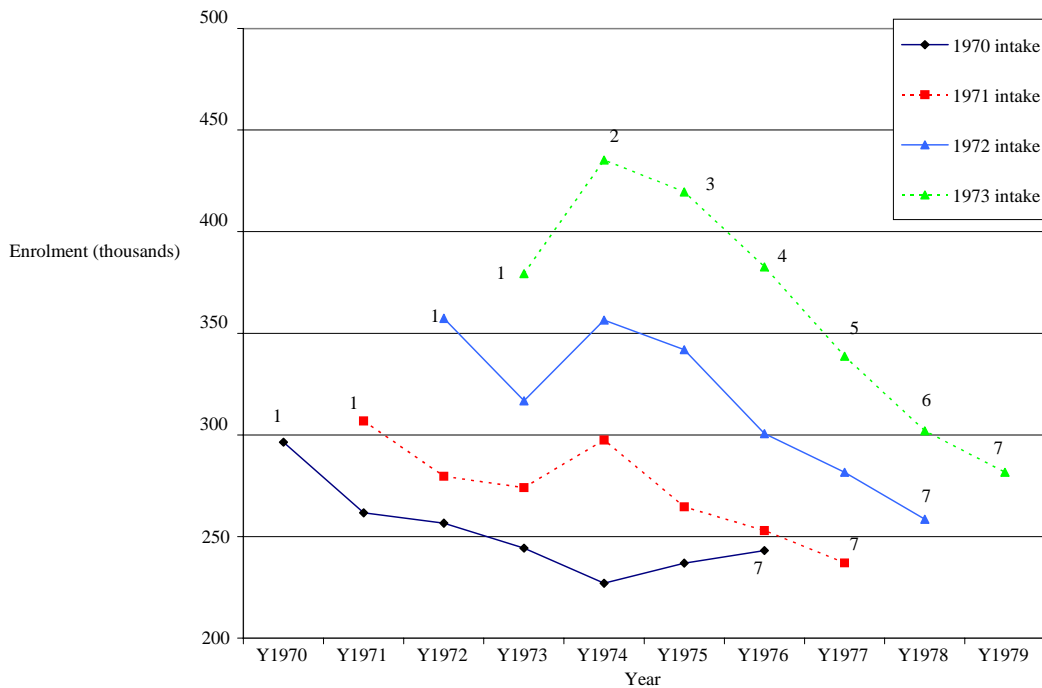
A study carried out in a single location in Nyeri District in 1971 and 1972 (Somerset, 1974) suggests that the official statistics may well under-state the true level of final-grade repetition in Kenya at this time, at least in the more educationally-advanced areas. Of the 275 Grade 7 pupils enrolled at the seven schools in this location in 1971, as many as 84, or 31%, were repeaters. Moreover among the 191 non-repeaters, no fewer than 94 (49%) were back in Grade 7 in 1972, either at the same school or another school within the same location; while another 23 (12%) were repeating Grade 7 at a school outside the location.

Further data from the same study (see Somerset, 1974) identified clearly the major reason why Grade 7 repetition was so prevalent (and so problematic) at the time: there was a huge payoff to it. The culminating event of the final primary year was the Certificate of Primary Education (CPE), an examination which, because it governed access to government secondary schooling, had crucial consequences for the life chances of the young people sitting it. In the 1971 CPE, the Nyeri repeaters scored on average nearly one standard deviation higher than those who were sitting the examination for the first time. So the repeaters were at an enormous advantage in the competition for secondary school places: as many as 50 percent of them were successful, compared to only 12 percent of the non-repeaters. In consequence:

‘(it was) the established and expected pattern for pupils in this location to spend two years in the final (grade) – and to sit the examination twice’

(Somerset, 1974:176)

Figure 3 Kenya Primary School Cohort Survival Curves, Grade 1 Intakes 1970 to 1973



In 1973 the Kenyan Government announced a major initiative: as from the beginning of the 1974 school year, formal school fees were abolished for the first four primary grades. The impact of this reform on the 1971, 1972 and 1973 intakes, already at school when fees were abolished, can be seen in Figure 3. The U-shaped cohort survival curves characteristic of the 1960s intakes, are replaced by curves of quite different shape.

The 1971 Grade 1 class was the first to benefit from the 1974 abolition of fees, albeit only to a limited degree. For the first two years the survival curve followed the contours of previous cohorts, dropping by about 30,000 pupils by Grade 3 in 1973. But then in 1974, the first fee-free year, enrolments jumped sharply, reaching a level only a little below that of the original enrolment three years earlier. Almost certainly most of these new recruits were drawn from among pupils who had previously dropped out from a middle-primary grade because of financial difficulties.

But the gain in enrolment was only temporary. When fees were re-imposed in Grade 5, the cohort dropped back again, more sharply than it had risen in the previous year, and continued to decline right through to Grade 7 in 1977. This final-year class was, in fact, smaller than the corresponding class of the previous intake, which had not, of course, had the benefit of any free education.

Similar patterns can be seen with the Grade 1 classes of 1972 and 1973, which received two and three years of fee-free education respectively. In both cohorts, substantial enrolment increases were recorded in 1974, followed by fairly steep

declines when fees were re-imposed in Grade 5. As with the 1971 intake, and in sharp contrast to the trends observed in the 1960s intakes, these declines continued through to Grade 7 at the end of the primary cycle.

Grade 1 GERs rose between 1970 and 1973 from 79 in the former year to 89 in the latter, while Grade 5 GERs rose more sharply from 57 to 81, clearly benefiting from the fees-abolition re-entrants to Grades 2, 3 and 4.

The appropriate diagonal cells in Table 2 show that, for the 1971 and 1972 Grade 1 cohorts at least, repetition rates in the final two primary grades continued to be much higher than those in lower grades, despite the radical change in the shape of the cohort survival curves. For the 1972 intake, for example, repeaters accounted for only 4.86% of the Grade 5 cohort (1976); 6.57% of the Grade 6 cohort (1977); but as much as 12.32% of the Grade 7 cohort (1978). Over this two-year period the number of repeaters *rose* by 16,300 (from 14,600 to 31,900); whereas total enrolment *fell* by 42,300 (from 300,800 to 258,500). Hence it can be estimated that about 59,000 of the pupils in this cohort dropped out of school between Grade 5 and Grade 7. Similar calculations for the 1971 Grade 1 cohort yield an estimate of 38,000 dropouts over the same two-year period.

It is evident, then, that upper-primary dropout rates increased sharply in the two cohorts which entered Grade 1 in 1971 and 1972. Table 2 consolidates the data.

Table 2 Estimated Upper-Primary (Grade 5 to 7) Dropout, Grade 1 Cohorts of 1970, 1971 and 1972

Grade 1 year	Grade 5 enrolment	Estimated dropout, Grade 5 to 7	Grade 5 -7 dropout as proportion of Grade 5 enrolment
1970	227,600	8,000	3.5%
1971	264,700	38,000	14.4%
1972	300,800	59,000	19.6%

At least two factors are likely to have contributed to this sudden, and dramatic, rise in upper-primary dropout in the 1971 and 1972 Grade 1 cohorts:

1. As we have seen when discussing Figure 3, the 1971 and 1972 cohorts were both augmented by substantial numbers of young people who re-entered school when formal school fees for the first four primary grades were abolished in 1974. The cohort curves suggest that most of these re-entrants dropped out again when fees were re-imposed in Grade 5, but even among those who survived, dropout during the final two years of the primary course is likely to have been more frequent than among those who had completed the lower grades without interruption.
2. The 1974 abolition of school fees led to a massive surge in the Grade 1 enrolment. Details will be discussed in the next section, but in brief, the number of primary school enrollees more than doubled between 1973 and 1974. It is probable that many if not most schools attempted to cope with the sudden flood of lower-primary pupils

by diverting resources from the upper grades. The quality of upper-primary instruction was almost certainly affected, which in turn may have contributed to increased dropout.

Figure 4 Kenya Primary School Cohort Survival Curves, Grade 1 Intakes, 1973 to 1978

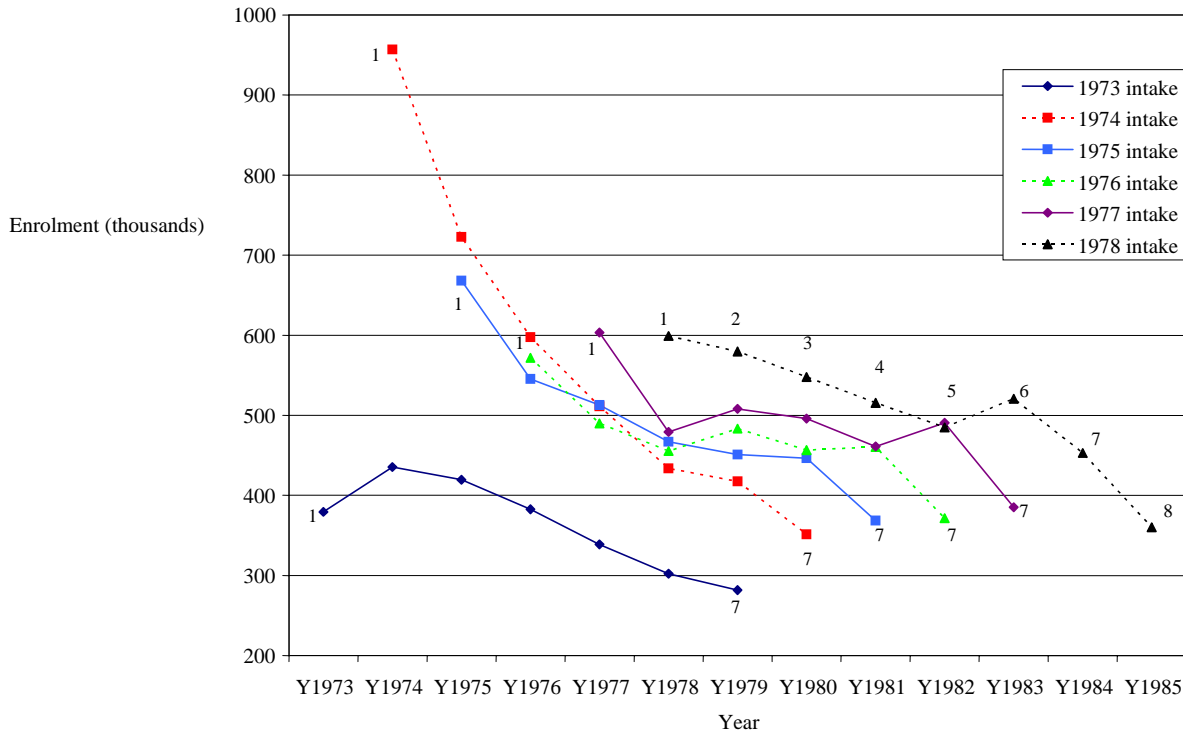


Figure 4 shows the cohort survival curve for the Grade 1 class of 1974, the first fee-free year, together with the curves for the succeeding classes through to 1978. For comparison, the curve for the 1973 class is repeated from Figure 3.

The enormous impact of fee abolition is evident. In a single year Grade 1 enrolment shot up from 379,000 (1973) to 956,800 (1974); an increase of no less than 152%!⁴ Although the school fee had amounted to only Shs 60 (USD 8) per annum, and had been frozen at this level since 1964, it had clearly acted as a major deterrent to the school participation of many children from low-income families.

Fortunately for the schools, if not for their new recruits, the sharp rise in Grade 1 enrolments in 1974 was followed by an equally dramatic rise in dropout as the cohort moved through the school system. By the time the 1974 Grade 1 class reached Grade 5 in 1978, it had been reduced in number from 956,800 to only 433,700, an apparent four-year dropout rate of 54.7%.⁵ The comparable rate for the 1970 class, the last

⁴ As can be seen from Table 1, repeaters made up only 2.02% of the 1974 Grade 1 class. Net of these repeaters, the class numbered 939,600.

⁵ Corrected for repetition, the dropout rate was even higher. Non-repeaters numbered 933,600 in the 1974 Grade 1 class, compared to 412,000 in the 1978 Grade 5 class, a loss of 56.2%.

cohort in the U-shaped sequence characteristic of the 1960s, was only 23.4% (from 296,500 in Grade 1 to 227,000 in Grade 5).

Despite this accelerated attrition, however, the 1974 Grade 1 cohort remained substantially larger than its predecessor throughout the primary school sequence. The survivors to Grade 7 in 1980 numbered 351,400, compared to only 281,700 the previous year.

Age-specific data are unfortunately not available, but there is no doubt that the 1974 Grade 1 class was heavily inflated by over-age pupils, taking advantage of fee abolition to start a delayed education. The Grade 1 GER shot up from 91% in 1973 to 221% in 1974, an exceptional and unsustainable level. During school visits in 1974 it was common to see adolescent boys and girls, and even the occasional adult, sitting among the regular six- and seven-year olds in the Grade 1 classes. Even in the few schools where the older pupils were taught separately, little attempt was made to modify traditional infant-room approaches to make them better suited to the needs of more mature learners.

In 1975, the Grade 1 enrolment fell back substantially from its 1974 peak, and from 1976 to 1978 appeared to be stabilizing at around 600,000 pupils per annum. Even at these reduced levels, however, enrolments were still well over 50% higher than they had been in 1973, and double the levels of 1970 and 1971. By 1978 the Grade 1 GER stood at 120%; much reduced from the exceptional level of 1974, but nevertheless 30 points higher than the levels of 1970 and 1971.

The rapid expansion in enrolments starting in 1974 placed enormous strains on the primary schools. Trained teachers, school equipment and classrooms were all in short supply. To cope with the teacher shortage, Government recruited large numbers of untrained teachers. In 1973, untrained teachers had made up only 22% of the total primary teaching force, but this proportion jumped sharply to 33% in 1974, and further to 37% by 1976. It was only in 1977 that increased output from the teachers' colleges began to have an impact: in that year, the proportion of untrained teachers dropped back a little to 34%.

Rather surprisingly, overall teacher supply was little affected. Counting both trained and untrained teachers, the pupil-to-teacher ratio (PTR) rose from 32.11 in 1973 to 34.54 in 1974, but was back to 32.50 by 1976.

For most schools, the major burden created by the 1974 fees abolition was undoubtedly the necessity to construct more buildings. While teachers' salaries and other recurrent costs were, then as now, met by Central Government, the schools themselves were responsible for the construction of classrooms, offices and teachers' houses, and for buildings maintenance. Until 1978, most schools raised the necessary funds by imposing a building levy on each family sending pupils to the school.

Fortuitously or otherwise, the steeply-rising demand for new school buildings from 1974 onwards coincided with a sharp increase in construction costs. During the early 1970s a new classroom for 40 pupils could be built from permanent materials (concrete floor, stone or brick walls, corrugated iron roof) for around Shs 10,000 (USD 1300) in most rural districts. By 1978, the cost had risen to Shs 25-30,000.

Many schools responded by raising their building levies, often to levels higher than the old school fee. In a school visited in 1978, located in a rural area which had benefited from a recent boom in coffee and tea prices, the building levy was as much as Shs 600 (USD 80) per family, equivalent to the old school fee for ten children! The head teacher expected to raise Shs 90,000, but as he pointed out, this would be sufficient to build only three new classrooms, leaving nothing over for urgently-needed teachers' houses and for the maintenance of existing buildings.

A first look at the graphs shown in Figure 4 might suggest that after the 1974 Grade 1 intake, lower- and middle-grade dropout rates improved rapidly in subsequent intakes. However this initial impression is misleading: the abolition of the building levy in 1979, to be discussed in the next section, led to substantial, although unknown, numbers of previous dropouts re-entering school, usually into a lower or middle grade. The impact of these re-entrants can be seen in the curves for the 1976 and 1977 Grade 1 cohorts: in each case, enrolments increased between 1978 and 1979.

Nevertheless it does seem that a partial recovery from the very high dropout levels of the 1974 cohort was under way before the impact of building-levy abolition in 1979. Whereas the 1974 cohort lost 37.5% of its numbers by Grade 3, two years later the comparable figures for the 1975 and 1976 cohorts were only 23.4% and 20.4% respectively.

2.1 Impact of Certificate of Primary Education (CPE) league tables

During the period covered by the cohort survival curves shown in Figure 4, the shape of the curves began to be affected by another Government initiative: the introduction of CPE league tables. The Kenya National Examination Council (KNEC) first calculated CPE league tables after the 1976 examination. The tables established merit orders based on mean CPE standard scores at two levels of aggregation, first, at the district level,⁶ and then within each district, at the school level.

For the first two years circulation of the lists was restricted to professional staff in the Ministry of Education headquarters, and to the district field officers. Following the 1978 examination, however, the decision was taken to disseminate the results widely, through the mass media.

(The tables) created a great deal of interest, and CPE performance immediately became a major public issue. Politicians, ministry officials, teachers' union officials, administrative officers and newspaper editors joined in a lively debate as to the causes of poor performance and the remedies for it. In many districts, trophies were established to give recognition to outstandingly successful schools. (Somerset, 1987:69)

According to media reports, public meetings were held in at least ten districts to discuss local CPE performance, and ways of improving it.

⁶ Separate lists were established for urban and rural districts, because of the wide performance differences between them

The CPE had of course always been a high-stakes examination for the pupils sitting it, but from 1978 onwards it also carried important consequences for those responsible for CPE instruction. A school's ranking within the CPE league table quickly came to have a major impact on the prestige, professional standing, and often the career prospects, of its principal and teaching staff.

Until 1978 all CPE stakeholders shared a single goal: to maximize the number of primary school leavers winning places in government-maintained secondary schools. In consequence, pupils who had failed to win a place at their first attempt were encouraged to return to Grade 7 for a second try. Judging from the results of the Nyeri study already discussed (Somerset 1974), this strategy was highly successful: Nyeri candidates repeating the examination were four times as likely to win a secondary place as those sitting for the first time.

From 1978 onwards, however, teachers and principals faced a second and not fully compatible target: to enhance the position of the school in the district CPE league table. Rankings in the league tables depended on mean scores for all candidates; not the total number gaining secondary places. Hence it became advantageous to require weaker pupils to repeat Grade 6 rather than allowing them to continue into Grade 7, where their CPE performance might adversely affect the school mean score. Whereas in earlier years the interests of the two groups of stakeholders - pupils and their parents on the one hand, principals and teachers on the other - had been identical, from 1978 onwards they tended to diverge. From the perspective of the principals and teachers, a relatively small group of high-achieving CPE candidates was to be preferred to a larger, more heterogeneous group. This was despite the fact that the secondary-school prospects of the lower-achieving pupils might be enhanced considerably by a second year in Grade 7, and a second attempt at the selection examination.

Most unfortunately, repetition data for the relevant years are not at present available. Nevertheless it is virtually certain from the shape of the upper-grade cohort curves to be seen in Figure 4 that the schools did in fact respond to the introduction of the CPE league tables in this fashion. From Grade 5 to Grade 7 the curve takes a 'dog-leg' shape, with the enrolment in Grade 6 higher, and in Grade 7 lower, than would be expected from the overall trend. The first indication of this pattern can be seen in the 1975 Grade 1 cohort, which reached Grade 6 in 1980 - two years after dissemination of the CPE league tables started. By the time the 1977 cohort reached Grade 6 two years later, the pattern was well established. Grade 6 enrolment in 1982 amounted to 490,600; nearly 30,000 higher than the Grade 5 enrolment the previous year (461,000) and more than 105,000 higher than the Grade 7 enrolment the following year (385,300).

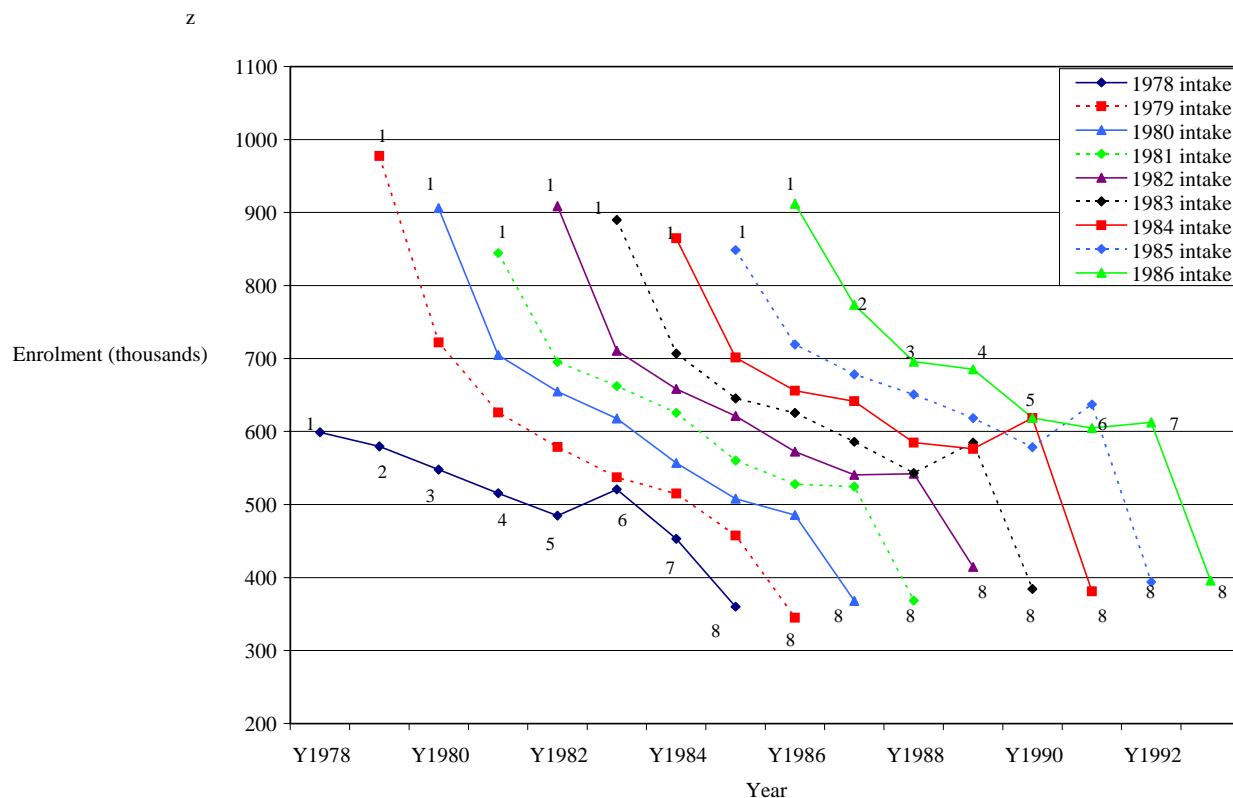
2.2 Introduction of the eight-year primary sequence

As part of a major restructuring of the education system implemented over several years, Government replaced the old seven-year primary school sequence with an extended eight-year sequence in 1985. Because of the changeover, there was no CPE at the end of 1984, and no secondary school intake in 1985. At the end of 1985 a new selection examination, the Kenya Certificate of Primary Education or KCPE, was

introduced. The KCPE was modeled broadly on the old CPE, but several new subjects, including in particular Kiswahili, were introduced.

The final graph in Figure 4 shows the experience of the 1978 Grade 1 class, the first cohort to complete the extended eight-year primary sequence. It is noteworthy that although the cohort was not required to sit an external examination in Grade 7, there was still a clear enrolment peak in Grade 6. It may be that many schools, unsure as to how well their pupils would cope with the new, more broadly-based KCPE, played safe by continuing to hold back some of their slower learners for a second year in Grade 6.

Figure 5 Kenya Primary School Cohort Survival Curves, Grade 1 Intakes, 1978 to 1986



In 1978 Government announced a further reform: from the beginning of 1979, schools would no longer be permitted to collect building funds by direct levy from the families sending pupils to the school. Instead, funds were to be raised by Harambee (self-help) activities, involving the community as a whole. Figure 5 shows the apparent cohort curve for the 1979 Grade 1 class, together with the curves for the seven following classes, through to 1986. Again for comparison, the 1978 cohort curve is repeated from Figure 4.

As we have seen, many schools increased their building levies from 1974 onwards, to cope with burgeoning enrolments and escalating construction costs. The extent to which these levies kept children away from school is evident from the response to their abolition in 1979.

In some respects, the patterns repeated those seen after the abolition of school fees in 1974. The Grade 1 enrolment jumped to 977,400, marginally higher than the 1974 peak, and a 63% increase over 1978. Nevertheless the Grade 1 GER was lower than in the earlier peak year, 190% compared with 221%, because of rapid population growth in the intervening five years.⁷

As in 1974, dropout from this first post-reform cohort was exceptionally high. By the time the group reached Grade 5 in 1983, enrolment was down to 537,400, a drop of 45.0%. The comparable figure for the 1974 Grade 1 cohort was 54.7%.

⁷ Estimated at 3.59% pa for the six-year age group over the 1969-79 inter-census period

In discussing the 1974 Grade 1 enrolment we relied on observational evidence to argue that a substantial proportion of the pupils attracted into school by fees abolition were over-age. For the 1979 enrolment, however, more systematic evidence is available. Table 3 sets out the data: it compares the age profile of Grade 1 enrollees in 1978, when building levies were still imposed, and 1979, after they were abolished.

Table 3 Age Profile of Kenya Grade 1 Enrollees in 1978 and 1979

Age	1978	1979	Percentage increase, 1978 to 1979
6 years	260,500	339,200	30%
7 years	220,900	364,300	65%
8 and 9 years	106,200	230,400	117%
10 years and over	11,500	43,400	278%
Total, all ages	599,100	977,400	63%

Among the Grade 1 pupils enrolling at the minimum age of six years, there was a modest increase of 30% between 1978 and 1979. But over-age pupils of eight or nine years more than doubled in number, while the small group of pupils aged 10 years or over increased nearly four-fold.

We have seen that in 1974, Government responded to the sudden jump in primary enrolments by hiring large numbers of untrained teachers. In 1979, however, the patterns were different: the new pupils were accommodated not by recruiting teachers, but by increasing class sizes. Despite a total enrolment increase of 703,000 (from 2,994,900 in 1978 to 3,698,200 in 1979), only 2,436 additional teachers were recruited (90,391 to 92,827), so the pupil-to-teacher ratio rose steeply, from 33.13 to 39.84. In subsequent years teacher recruitment increased, but nevertheless the PTR did not return to a level below 35 until 1985.

The most striking feature of the post-1979 cohort curves shown in Figure 5 is their stability. Grade 1 enrolments continued at levels around 900,000 through until 1986, only a little lower than the 1979 enrolment of 977,400. After 1974, by contrast, Grade 1 enrolments immediately dropped back sharply, from 956,800 to levels around 600,000.

Furthermore, apparent dropout rates improved only slowly. The 1979 Grade 1 class, as we have seen, lost as many as 45.0% of its numbers by Grade 5 in 1983. Seven years later, the comparable loss from the 1986 class was 32.2%. This was, by a considerable margin, a higher proportionate loss than had been experienced from any of the Grade 1 classes in the post-Independence years 1964 to 1970.⁸

Apparent dropout at the very beginning of the schooling cycle, between Grade 1 and Grade 2, is particularly striking. More than 26% of the 1979 Grade 1 class seems to

⁸ Apparent Grade 1 – 5 dropout rates in these cohorts ranged from 26.4% (1964) to 18.4% (1970).

have left school within one year, while for the 1986 class the proportion was still more than 15%.

With the information at present available, we can do no more than suggest possible reasons for these high and persistent lower-grade dropout rates. Both in-school and out-of-school factors are likely to have been involved. Perhaps many of the new entrants dropped out because teachers, classrooms or other facilities were lacking. Perhaps many low-income families remained too dependent on the labour of their older children to allow them to remain at school for longer than a few years. Further enquiry is needed.

A further possible explanation for the observed trends should be noted. It might be that the apparent losses in enrolment, particularly between Grades 1 and 2, are due in part to heavy repetition in Grade 1 rather than to genuine dropout. However this explanation seems implausible, on two counts. First, the repetition data for the years 1974 to 1978, shown in Table 1, shows no clear tendency for repetition to be more prevalent in Grade 1 than in any of the other lower and middle grades; and second, the response of the schools to the enrolment wave of 1974 was to *reduce* Grade 1 repetition, rather than to increase it. Unfortunately repetition data for the post-1978 years are not currently available, so it is not possible to settle the matter.

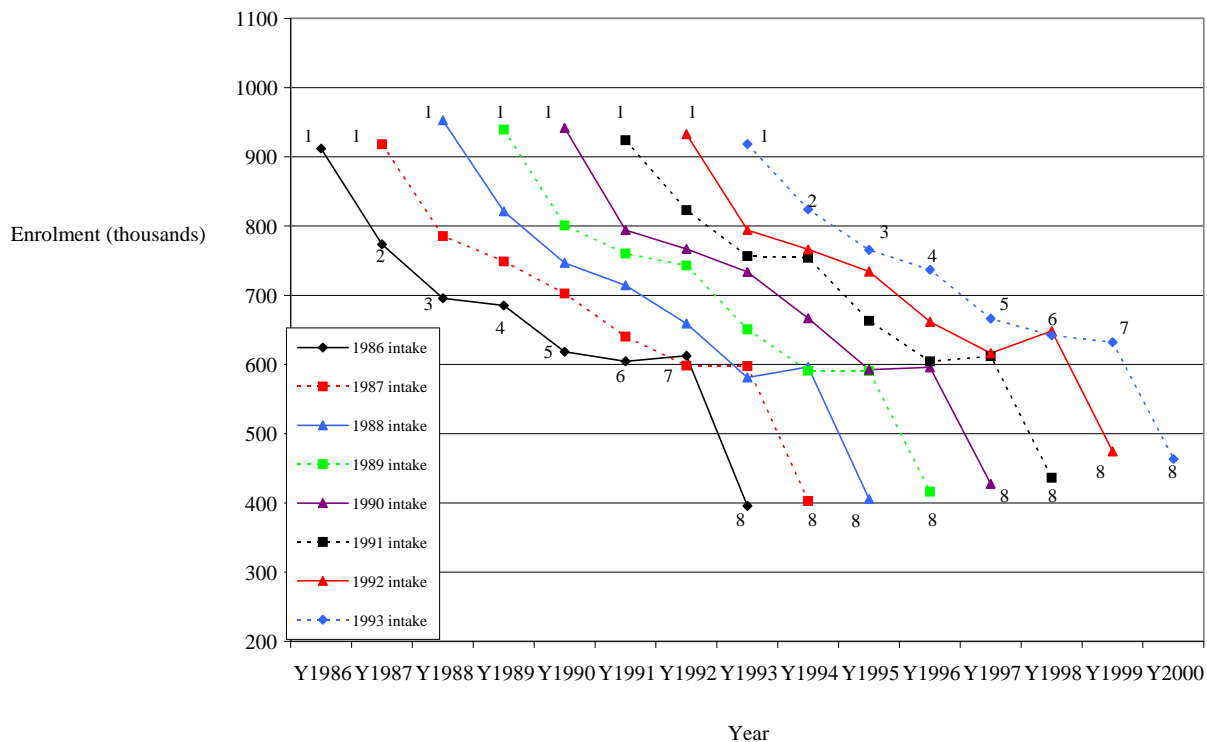
2.3 KCPE league tables

The Kenya National Examinations Council continued disseminating league tables after the introduction of the new terminal examination, the Kenya Certificate of Primary Education, in 1985. The inclusion of Kiswahili as an examination subject brought about substantial changes in the district-level merit order list: coastal districts, where Kiswahili is widely spoken as a mother tongue or strong lingua franca, tended to benefit at the expense of central and western districts, where the language is less-commonly used.

As we have already seen, many schools had responded to the original dissemination of CPE league tables after the 1979 examination by retaining some of their weaker pupils in Grade 6 for a second year, in order to improve the school's standing in the local league table. In consequence, the upper-grade cohort curves took on a 'dog-leg' shape, with Grade 6 enrolments higher, and Grade 7 enrolments considerably lower, than would be anticipated from the lower-grade trends.

It took three years for the repetition patterns to adapt fully to the extension of the primary cycle from seven to eight years. Judging from the shape of the cohort curves, it seems that with the initial eight-year cohort, the schools continued to retain some of their weaker pupils in Grade 6, but that over the next two years the peak repetition year moved from Grade 6 to Grade 7. The characteristic 'dog-leg' pattern re-emerges clearly with the group which reached Grade 7 in 1987, and becomes more pronounced with each of the succeeding cohorts shown in Figure 2.4. For the final cohort, which reached Grade 7 in 1991, the Grade 7 enrolment amounted to 637,100: nearly 60,000 higher than the Grade 6 enrolment the previous year (578,600) and more than 240,000 higher than the Grade 8 enrolment in the following year (393,800).

Figure 6 Kenya Primary School Cohort Survival Curves, Grade 1 Intakes, 1986 to 1993



During the intake period covered by Figure 7 (1986 to 1992), the cohort curves remained broadly similar in shape to those shown in Figure 6 which we have just discussed.

Grade 1 enrolments changed little, rising from the 1986 level of 912,000 to 952,800 in 1988, but then falling back to 932,700 in 1992. With a rising school-age population, the estimated Grade 1 GER dropped from 141 to 128 over the same period.

Apparent lower-grade dropout rates remained obstinately high, with only the most marginal improvement. As we have already seen, the 1986 Grade 1 class lost 32.2% of its numbers by Grade 5 in 1990. Comparable losses from the 1989 and 1992 intakes were 30.3% and 29.1% respectively, still proportionately higher than the losses from any of the intakes between 1964 and 1969, during the early post-Independence years.

The upper-grade cohort curves continued to display the ‘dog-leg’ shape brought about by substantial repetition in Grade 7, the year before the KCPE examination; although for reasons which are not at present clear, the patterns were less conspicuous than they were in the cohorts reaching Grade 7 in 1989, 1990 and 1991.

Figure 7 Kenya Primary School Cohort Survival Curves, Intakes, 1993 to 2003

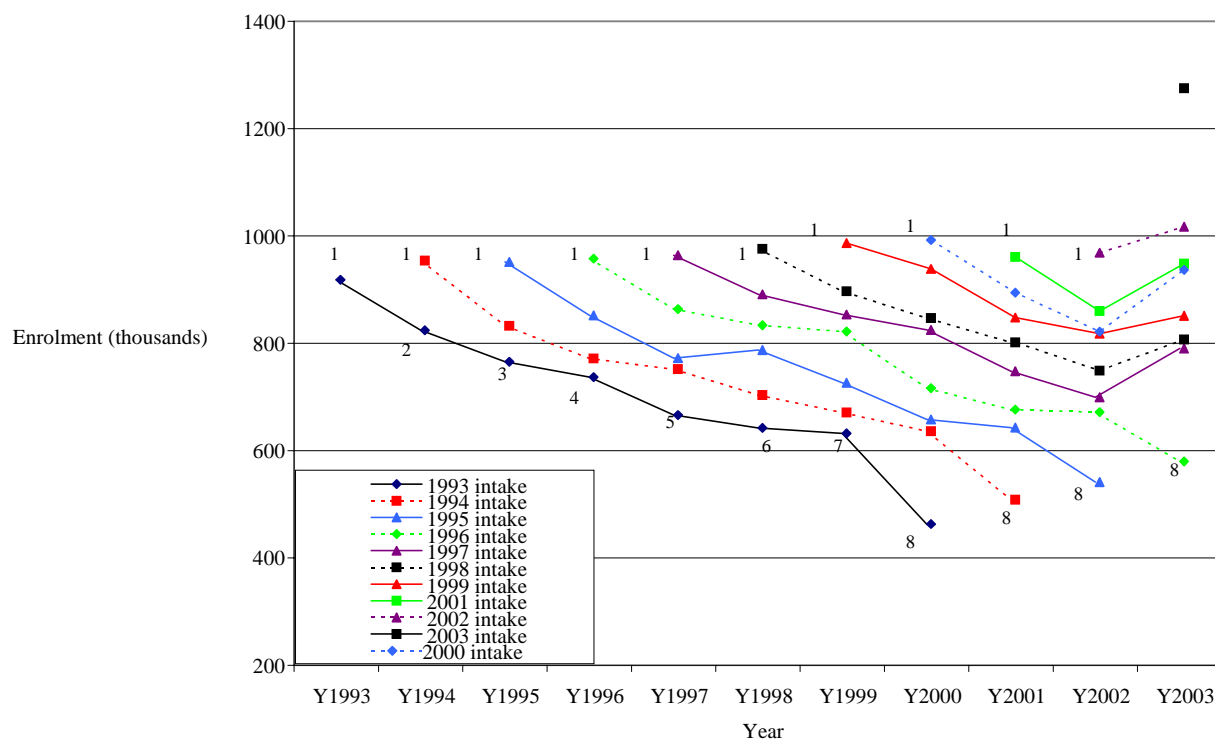


Figure 6 brings the 40-year primary enrolment sequence to a close, with data for the Grade 1 intakes between 1993 and 2003. Most of the cohort curves are, of course, still incomplete.

After rising gently from 918,600 in 1993 to 992,000 in 2000, Grade 1 intakes fell back a little to 969,000 in 2002, but then shot up by more than 30% to 1,275,600 in 2003, in response to the *second* abolition of school fees. There were similar, although less steep, enrolment increases in all the higher grades, with the exception of Grade 8.

The high dropout rates from the lower primary grades which had persisted throughout the 1980s and early 1990s finally showed clear signs of improvement. Whereas the 1992 Grade 1 class lost 29.1% of its numbers by Grade 5, the comparable loss from the 1995 class was only 23.7%, and from the 1998 class, 23.2%. Nevertheless, retention in these cohorts was no better than it had been with the intakes of the early post-Independence years.

In 1999, the Commission of Enquiry into the Education System of Kenya (the Koech Commission) (Republic of Kenya, 1999) published a wide ranging survey of teaching and learning in the schools, and concluded that the pressure of examinations and their attendant league tables, together with the heavy workload imposed by the 8-4-4 curriculum, was responsible for a ‘lack of depth in the learning and teaching process’ (Republic of Kenya, 1999, para 7.7.10). The Commission recommended the immediate abolition of examination league tables:

Rec 7.4.1 The school ranking system be abolished forthwith, and other more credible ways of encouraging schools to pursue excellence in academic and other areas be identified (Republic of Kenya, 1999).

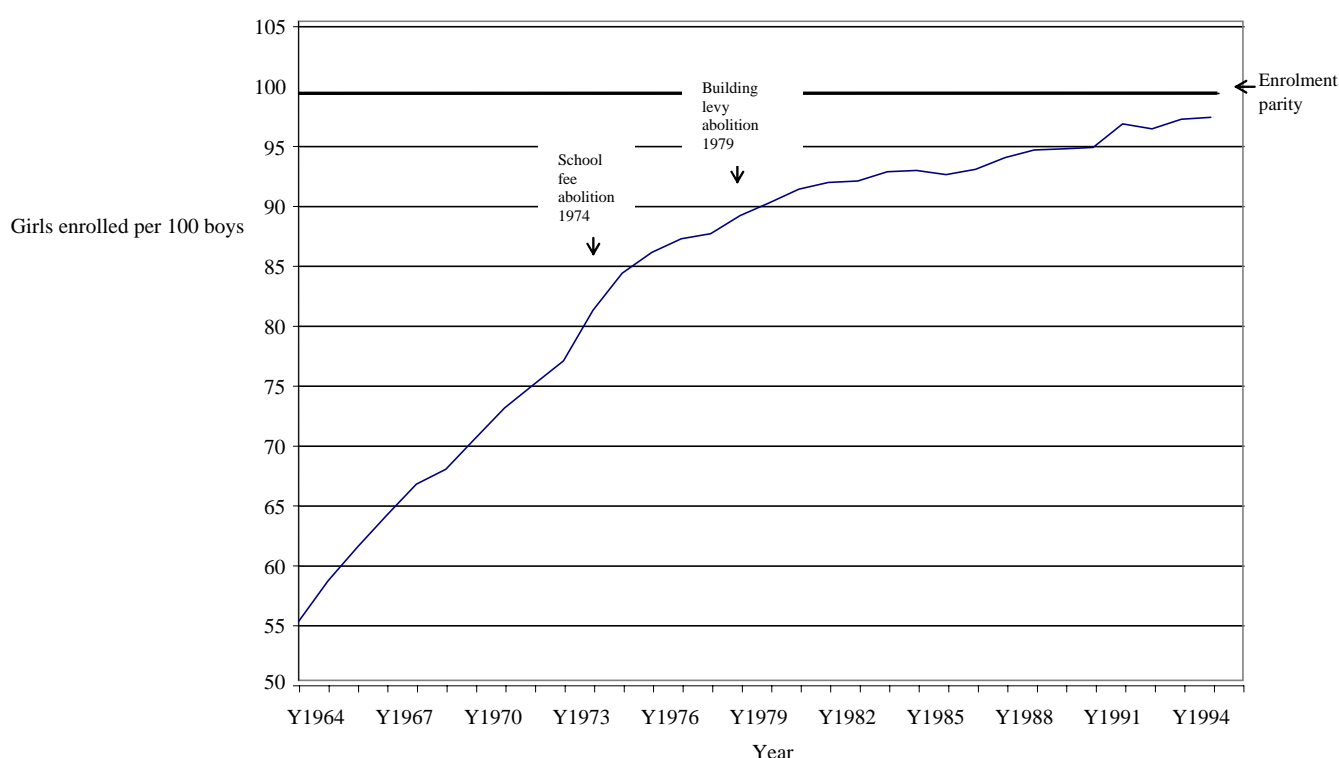
Responding to this recommendation, KNEC discontinued the dissemination of school-level league tables immediately, although the names of pupils scoring the highest grades, and the schools they have attended, are still publicized. Almost certainly as a consequence, the ‘dog-leg’ shape which had characterized the upper-primary cohort curves for more than a decade became much less prominent in the cohorts reaching Grade 8 from 2001 onwards.

3. Gender

3.1 Overall trends

Figure 7 gives an overview of changes in girls' participation in primary schooling since Independence in 1964. Girls' participation, plotted on the vertical axis, is calculated as the proportion of girls enrolled at primary school for every 100 boys (the Gender Parity Index, or GPI). The line of gender parity, where girls' enrolments match those of boys and the GPI reaches 100, is highlighted near the top of the chart.⁹

Figure 8 Kenya Representation of Girls in Primary School Enrolments, Girls Enrolled per 100 Boys, all grades, 1964 to 1995



At Independence, girls were still very much in a minority: the GPI stood at just 55, indicating that there were only about 55 girls enrolled at primary school for every 100 boys. Over the next few years, however, there was rapid movement towards more equal participation. By 1969, only five years later, the GPI had jumped to 68, and by 1973 it had reached 77.

It seems that during this first post-Independence decade changing parental and community attitudes, rather than any specific policy initiative, were mainly responsible for the dramatic improvement in girls' access to schooling opportunities. But Government's abolition of formal school fees in 1974 gave added impetus to this

⁹ It should be stressed that the GPI measures parity in terms of enrolments, not in terms of the proportion of the population attending school. In Kenya, as in most countries, boys outnumber girls in population age groups below about 15, while thereafter girls tend to predominate. The 1989 Census gives an estimated 98.4 girls for every 100 boys in the six-year age group; whereas in the 15-19 age group the ratio is 101.9 to 100.

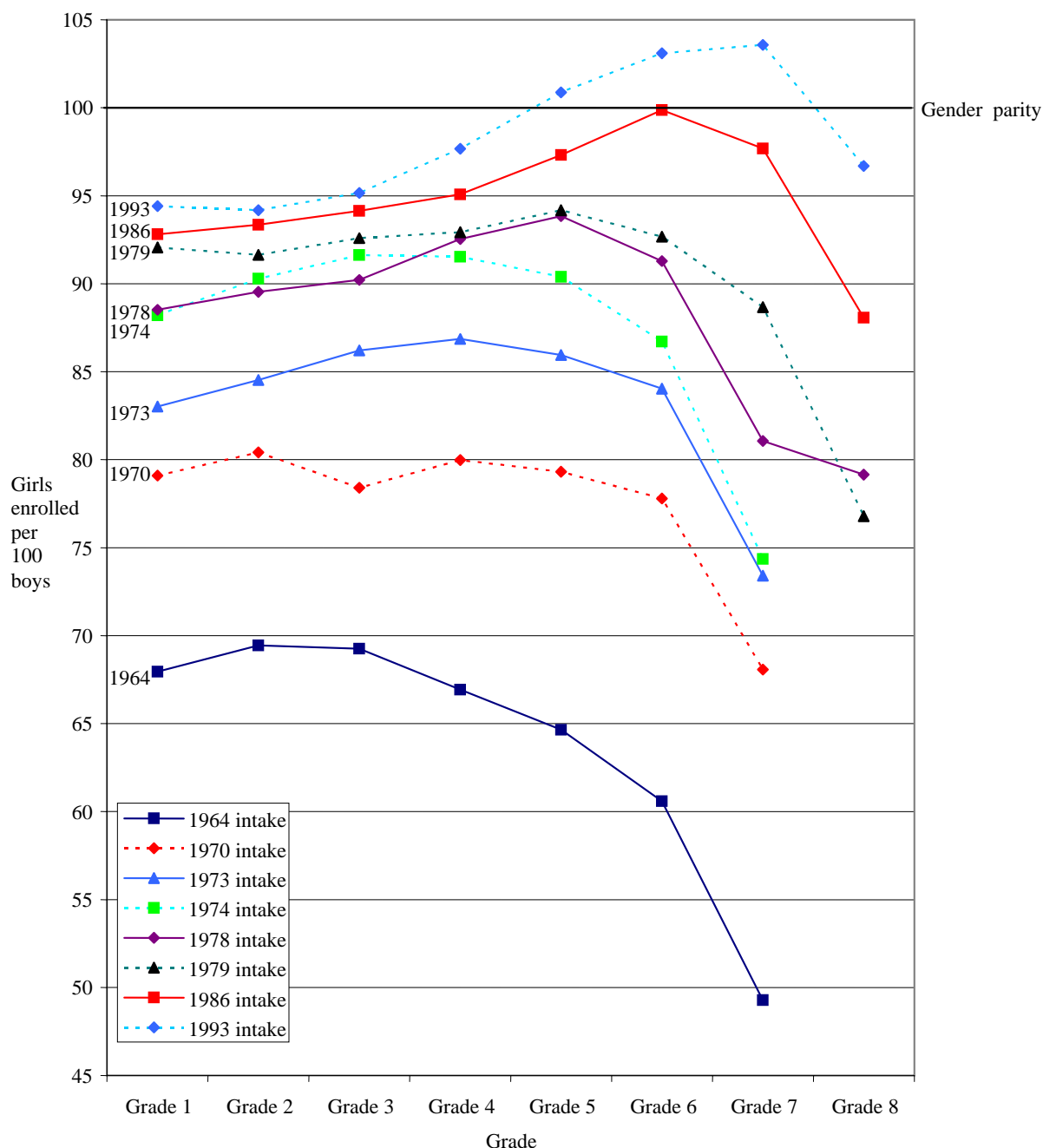
already well-established social trend. In the two years between 1973 and 1975, the GPI shot up from 77 to nearly 85; a higher annual rate of improvement than had been achieved at any time since Independence. Clearly a disproportionate share of the young people who had been excluded from school by the fee barrier had been girls.

The 1979 abolition of the building levy gave another, although much weaker, boost to girls' participation; but since 1980, as the group of excluded girls has become smaller but increasingly marginal, further improvement has been much slower. The GPI reached 95 in the early 1990s, since when it has changed little.

3.2 Girls' participation by grade

Figure 8 again shows changes in girls' primary-school participation since Independence, but disaggregated to show trends from grade to grade. The horizontal axis plots the seven grade levels making up the primary education sequence (eight levels from 1985 onwards); while the vertical axis plots the Gender Parity Index (GPI), as in Figure 8.

Figure 9 Kenya Representation of Girls in Primary School Enrolments, Grade 1 Intakes, Selected Years 1964 to 1993



The graphs chart changes in girls' participation from grade to grade, for seven selected Grade 1 intakes; starting with the intake of 1964, and ending with the intake of 1993, the last group for which reliable enrolment information through to Grade 8 is available. They show remarkably consistent trends, in sharp contrast to the cohort survival curves, which as we have seen in Section 2 changed shape radically on several occasions.

First, there is a consistent movement of the successive intake curves from the bottom of the chart (low GPIs) towards the top (higher GPIs), reflecting the overall trend since Independence towards greater girls' participation which we have already discussed. With only a few exceptions, the curves never overlap.

Further, the GPI curves are all of a consistent inverted-U shape. They all rise from a relatively low level in Grade 1 to a high point in an intermediate grade, then drop again by the final grade.

However the high point in the inverted-U curve moves over time, from junior grades in the earlier cohorts to more senior grades in the most recent cohorts.

In the 1964 intake, the Gender Parity Index (GPI) reached its highest point in Grade 2. It started at 66 in Grade 1, rose to 69 in Grade 2 the following year, and thereafter fell steeply through the middle and upper grades, to only 49 by Grade 7.

In the 1973 intake nine years later, the highest GPI point moved to Grade 4. Starting at 83 in Grade 1, the GPI rose over three years to 87 in Grade 4, then dropped back to 74 by Grade 7.

In the 1986 intake, the GPI started at 93 in Grade 1, rose steadily over five years to 100 (parity with boys) by Grade 6, then fell to 87 in Grade 8, the final year of the extended primary school cycle.

Finally in the 1993 intake, the Grade 1 GPI was 94, only one point higher than the comparable figure for the 1986 intake seven years earlier. However in subsequent grades girls' participation rates were much higher in the later cohort, and the high point advanced by a further year. Girls' representation in the 1993 intake cohort continued to rise over six years, reaching 101 in Grade 5, and a peak of 103 in Grade 7. In the final year the GPI dropped back, but only to 97, three points higher than it had been in the entering Grade 1 class seven years earlier.

These rather complex patterns can perhaps best be understood as the consequence of the interplay of two sets of trends: first, changes in social attitudes to girls' education in the families and communities they come from; and second, changes in the learning environment experienced by girls once they enter school.

Judging from the patterns to be seen in Figure 8, it appears that crossing the threshold between home and school to enter Grade 1 still remains a barrier for substantial numbers of girls. Gender Parity Indices for the Grade 1 class rose steeply in the first 15 post-Independence years, from 68.0 in 1964 to 92.1 in 1979, but subsequently have remained static below the parity point, with indices between 1979 and 2002 nearly all within the narrow band 92 to 95.¹⁰

However once girls have entered school, it seems that in the lower grades they have tended to find the environment more congenial than the boys, and have therefore been

¹⁰ The highest Grade 1 GPI to date has been 96.4 in the year 2000; but subsequently it slipped to 94.4 in 2001 and 93.9 in 2002. It will be recalled that in the 1989 Census, six-year old girls were outnumbered by boys, 98.4 to 100.

less likely to drop out. Moreover, this effect has extended to the upper grades in recent years. The contrast between the curves for the 1979, 1986 and 1993 intakes is striking. The three intakes started with near-identical GPIs (92.1, 92.8 and 94.4 respectively), but by Grade 7 the GPIs were wide apart: 88.7 in the 1979 intake, 97.7 in the 1986 intake, and as high as 103.6 in the 1993 intake.

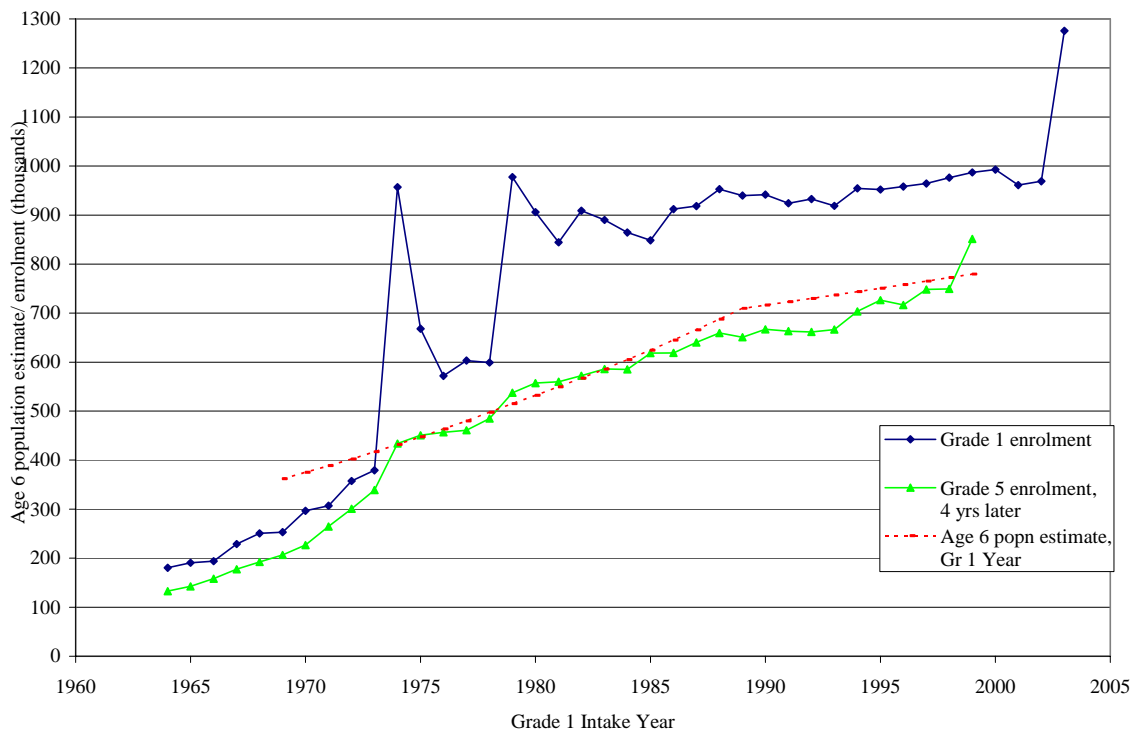
With the information available at present the reasons for these remarkable changes can only be guessed at. It seems probable that women now make up a higher proportion of the primary teaching force than they did in earlier years, though data to prove the point are not at present available. The motivation of girls to continue with their education is likely to be enhanced by the presence of same-sex adult role models in the school. Further, it may be that as the proportion of girls attending school has increased, this of itself has had a positive effect on the environment they encounter in the classroom. During learning transactions teachers, both male and female, are likely to pay increasing attention to the needs of girls as their numbers approach parity with the numbers of boys.

4. The Need for Further Analysis

The analyses presented in this preliminary paper have been based mainly on straightforward statistical data, taken from secondary sources and generally aggregated to the national level. More subtle qualitative information, based on local-level observation and discussion rather than on national-level counting, has been for the most part lacking. In consequence our account has been confined, at many points, to a simple description of enrolment trends, unsupported by an effective interpretive framework.

Perhaps the most important interpretive gap in our account concerns the response of the school system to Government's first attempt to bring about universal primary education through the abolition of school fees in 1974, and the later abolition of building levies in 1979. As we have seen, Grade 1 enrolments responded sharply to both reforms, but the gains were largely dissipated as the cohorts moved through subsequent grades by greatly-increased dropout. The issue is highlighted by the graph given as Figure 9, which plots Grade 1 enrolments since 1964 against Grade 5 enrolments five years later, together with population estimates for the Grade 1 (age 6) cohort. The immediate Grade 1 response to the twin reforms is evident, but enrolments in Grade 5, four years later, were largely unaffected. Instead, Grade 5 enrolments have continued, since the mid-1970s, on a gentle upward path, more or less in parallel to the growth in the age 6 population; while dropout rates between Grades 1 and 5 have never returned to the modest levels of the pre-1974 years.

Figure 10 Kenya Age 6 Population Estimates, Grade 1 intakes and Grade 5 survivors, 1964 to 2003



Clearly there are lessons to be learned from the reforms of the 1970s which are relevant to Government's renewed UPE drive. If they are not, there is real risk that problems encountered in the past may recur.

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Consortium for Research on
Educational Access, Transitions & Equity
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Report summary:

Kenya has introduced policies to promote universal primary schooling at least three times since independence. Analysis of enrolments over four decades shows how these initiatives have resulted in gains in participation which have not always been sustained. This study illuminates the dynamics of efforts to increase access to education and acts as a reminder that recent Education for All initiatives should learn from past experience if gains are to be sustained.

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