

# **Education Policies in Kenya: Does Free Secondary Education Promote Equity in Public Secondary Schools?**

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## **Abstract**

Education is the basis upon which economic, social and political development of any nation is founded. Thus despite its high cost, governments and households invest heavily in all forms of education. However, little is known about educational policies that promote equity in schooling across age and gender. This paper sheds light on the associations between gender, age, enrolment and the cost of secondary education using data from one county in Eastern Kenya. The results show that the cost of girls' school uniform is 12% higher than that of boys, and there is a strong correlation between the cost of uniform and gender of the student ( $p < 0.05$ ). The cost of uniforms may be one source of observed differences in enrolments between girls and boys. We also show that costs differ by school types. In boarding schools, the unit cost of educating girls is higher than that for boys (the average cost in girls' schools is Ksh 52, 474 versus Ksh 49, 194 in boys'). However, the situation is reversed in day schools where the unit cost for boys is higher than that of girls (Ksh 31,323 versus Ksh 29,863). Further, although the cost of uniforms is lower for younger pupils, the cost for children aged 14-18 is the same but older children receive more pocket money from parents and guardians – a pattern observed in other countries. Generally, the unit cost of education negatively correlates with secondary school enrolment, suggesting that school fees may be a barrier to middle level education in countries where the burden of educating children is borne disproportionately more by households than by governments. Establishment of gender-and age-based subsidies for secondary education may be an effective mechanism for promoting equity in secondary education in Africa.

**Key Words:** Equity; Access; Educational policies.

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