

Computerizing Primary Schools in Rural Kenya: Outstanding Challenges and Possible Solutions

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Abstract

This paper investigates the outstanding challenges facing primary schools' computerization in rural Kenya. Computerization of schools is often envisaged as a 'magic', or at least a particularly efficient, solution to many of the problems that developing countries face in improving primary school education. However, while a great deal of consideration is given to the technical issues surrounding computer implementation, government policy makers, administrators, aid organizations and individuals participating in school computerization programs often have not carefully considered the contextual questions surrounding this endeavour. Specifically: 1.) what problems do rural schools actually want to solve with computerization; 2.) is computerization the most important priority for rural schools; 3.) are schools ready, in terms of infrastructure, for a computer in the classroom; or 4.) might there be better avenues for implementing access to the benefits of the digital age? These questions and the issue of school computerization are considered via results from a survey of thirty-seven rural Kenyan primary public schools. Results indicate that, while all schools had low ICT status making them primary targets for computerization, only eleven percent had at least one ICT compliant teacher, of which all were considered to require further training. In addition we found inadequate infrastructural preparedness - lack of access to electricity, internet; no classroom computer space, few desks, secure walls and protective roofing - posing severe challenges to the outstanding conception of computerization. We consider these results and make recommendations for better adapting programs for computer introduction, and also suggest the use of new innovative devices, such as cell phones, which might already have overcome many of the technical challenges found.

Keywords: ICT, Computerization, Techno-literacy, Primary schools, Classrooms, Cell phone.

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