

*Full Length Research Paper*

# Partnership examinations versus Kenya certificate of secondary education: one goal, different perspectives

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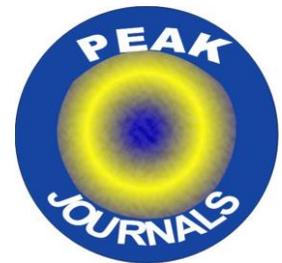
This study investigated the views of stakeholders towards partnerships in secondary school assessment examinations as a way of preparing students for the Kenya Certificate of Secondary Education (K.C.S.E.) examinations among selected Secondary Schools in the Western region of Kenya. The partnership exams have been very prevalent in Western Kenya Secondary Schools as a way of preparing form four students for K.C.S.E. This high prevalence made it necessary for this research to be carried out to establish the views of the different stakeholders towards these exams. The study was descriptive in nature and intra-national case study method was used with a focus on secondary schools in western region. Purposive sampling was used to select six secondary schools that were engaged in partnership assessments. Two research instruments were used: questionnaires and interviews. The questionnaires were used to collect data from students and teachers. The interviews were conducted with the Principals, Education officers, Heads of Departments (Administrators), teachers and students in the selected schools. The data collected were analyzed using descriptive statistics such as percentages and means to explain the views of the teachers, students, administrators and education officers. On the other hand, themes were used to analyze the qualitative data where the voices of the respondents were expressed inform of verbatim. The study found out that the teachers, students, administrators and education officers had varied views towards these exams with some in support and very comfortable with them while others were not. The study recommended standardization of the partnership exams to cater for students of all abilities, early planning for the exams to avoid congestion on school timetables, motivation of teachers and students and establishment of clear rules to govern the partnerships for effectiveness.

**Key words:** Partnership examinations, Kenya certificate of secondary education, principals, education officers, western region.

## INTRODUCTION

Education is a fundamental human right and a foundation for human fulfilment, peace, sustainable development, economic growth, decent work, gender equality and responsible citizenship (UNESCO 2015a). Secondary education has to address the urgent need for expansion and challenges posed by rapid changes occurring in the society and the world of work (UNESCO-ACEID, 2010). It produces the final product ready for placement into relevant areas of skills needed in the job market. Thus, it is a defining moment in the education system. It was in

the light of this that the Education for All (EFA) conference held at Jomtien in Thailand in 1990 and the follow up at Dakar Senegal in 2000 agitated to universalize access and promote equity in education at all levels (UNESCO, 1990). The world declaration on EFA regardless of age, sex, location, ethnicity or physical ability was adopted. This stressed that education is one of the fundamental human rights. This call was further reinforced by the Millennium Development Goal (MDG) number two, which emphasized universal education for



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all aged between 15-24 by the year 2015 (UNESCO, 2005). However, this has not been achieved as portrayed by the statistics from sub-Saharan Africa that indicates enrolment rate of 41% in lower and 32% in upper secondary (UNESCO, 2015b). Many countries of the world have been in a rush to make the aspirations of providing secondary education practical by including it as part of basic education. This has further been supported by UNESCO (2015a) that has highlighted the critical role that different stakeholders can play in the attainment of post 2015 global education agenda.

In many countries there exist limited opportunities for all the individuals in the education system to be absorbed into institutions of further education (Geaney and Kellaghan, 1995). These choices require clear assessment strategies upon which to make such decisions. In education, testing is the only mechanism that provides evidence of the level of learning upon which such decisions can be made (Payne, 1992).

In Kenya, this has brought competition between schools because of the ranking that takes place when K.C.S.E. results are released. Despite the banning of ranking of schools by the government of Kenya, other stakeholders especially parents and teachers are still interested in informal ranking of schools as a way of gauging the performance of those schools. As Garcia et al. (2015) noted, competition has been assumed greatest among rivals with commensurate attributes on a relevant dimension. However, the competitive behaviour intensifies when rivals have high ranks compared to intermediate ones. This is well explained by the social comparison theory that indicates that individuals are propelled by a basic drive upward to improve their performance and simultaneously minimize or pre-empt discrepancies between their and other persons' level of performance. The action to reduce discrepancies interacts with the unidirectional push to do better and generate competitive behaviour to protect one's superiority (Garcia et al., 2013). In Kenya, schools are propelled to compete together in partnership examinations with the unidirectional goal of competing and out winning each other in K.C.S.E. In this case, schools will compete on academic dimensions that are relevant to them in terms of K.C.S.E. performance. They compare their performance with that of other schools that are somehow viewed to be better than they are which leads to competitive behaviour.

In Kenya, the anxieties of teachers and students over examination results had profound effects on secondary school education. A keen adherence to the syllabus, working over of old examination papers and re-administration of examination questions from other regions and high performing schools have become familiar (Stabler, 1969; Kasambeli and Gathara, 2014). This has a critical impact on the students and teachers that can lead to a negative impact. A review of researches by Polesel et al. (2012) confirms this by

indicating that high stake testing has a negative impact on teachers' pedagogies with a resultant degradation of student experiences of learning. A caution is given against the impact of a shift from focus on the needs of the child to the needs of the evaluation and reporting process.

At independence, Kenya saw the need to have a standard examination as a selection process and therefore teamed up with Uganda and Tanzania to form a common examination body, the East African Examinations Council (EAEC) in 1967 (Shiundu and Omulando, 1992). As well, the EAEC examinations were set by panels of subject specialists and not single individuals. Groups of teachers came together to form setting panels. After the break up of the East African community, the Kenya National Examination Council (KNEC) was created by an Act of Parliament in 1980. The KNEC Act constituted Chapter 225A of the laws of Kenya and formed the basis for the conduct of public examinations in the country (Shiundu and Omulando, 1992). KNEC was formed to replace the defunct East African Examinations Council (EAEC). The main aim was to conduct summative evaluation within the formal education system in Kenya except for university education (Shiundu and Omulando, 1992). The examinations are set centrally by panels constituting teachers from all over the country. This is meant to achieve standardization and avoid any bias. KNEC hires teachers to administer and mark at a central point; then results are released ranking all students in the country. National examinations have received more emphasis than internal examinations (Mwangi and Ouko, 2004). Indeed one of the major criticisms pointed out in the Master Plan on Education and Training (1997-2010) was that the curriculum implementation process was too dominated by the K.C.S.E. since most schools concentrated only on the K.C.S.E. examinations, doing anything they thought would improve the results (Republic of Kenya, 1998). A good school is not only looked at in terms of policies, practices or programs but at how well a school performs relative to other schools within similar composition and social economic contexts. The struggle is not to impart skills and knowledge but to produce good K.C.S.E. results (Chepkirui, 1999).

The only way students can be prepared to attain the desired results is through proper teaching and continuous testing. In any education system to examine is to test by questioning carefully so as to find out the level of knowledge, skills or qualifications of a student who has been undergoing a prescribed course of study privately or in public institution. This will as well test the effectiveness of teaching and the preparedness of teachers. The examination results are used as an indicator of the teachers' efficiency (Williams, 1992). Thus, an examination is not an end in itself but a means to assist in achieving the desired educational outcome since the weakness of the learners in an exam or test will

be identified resulting into re-teaching or change of strategy to achieve good results. However, examinations can be used as an incentive to study. Continuous efforts are needed for a student to learn. This effort is more easily measured when benefits accrue progressively and continuously to the learner. The more immediate and direct the benefits from increased proficiency in the subjects of study, the more the interest are kept up and the more easily his determination calls for the effort required (Brereton, 1944).

National examinations in Kenya have been used mainly for selection and certification purposes. This has therefore, been found to create undue competition that has affected the teaching and learning process. Much time is devoted to the preparation of examinations as opposed to covering of the syllabus for the purpose of achieving the curriculum objectives (Odero and Oloko, 2013). The increased emphasis on performance in the national examinations saw the rise of schools and regional exams that mocked the national ones. These were meant to prepare students and also predict their K.C.S.E. performance (Chepkirui, 1999). This practice gave rise to exams that brought together all schools in a district popularly known as District mocks. The examinations were set by individuals appointed by the district academic committee. The examinations were full of biasness, unfairness, below standard and even some students had prior exposure to them. This elicited a lot of hate and fear in the students. In some schools, students refused to sit for the examinations, while in others they went on strike destroying property and lives. This saw the rise of even more substandard commercial mock examinations (Mwangi, 2006). The situation stirred varied opinions including scrapping of mock exams by a parliamentary committee report in 2008. However, according to Mwanyumba and Mutwiri (2009) as cited in Odero and Oloko (2013) more attention is being given to school based assessment in order to strengthen the elements of evaluating the education system.

As the pressure for good results in K.C.S.E. intensified, schools also resorted to buying exams from exam vendors who compiled past papers and even set some, to give to their learners as a way of preparing them for Kenya Certificate of Secondary Education (K.C.S.E.). The exams were not necessarily good. As argued by Kigotho (2004), the examination vendors are regarded to have hijacked the teachers' roles and are making a lot of money by providing tests that are not valid and reliable to schools. This has directly replaced the teachers' role of setting examinations according to the content that they have taught in class.

Teachers have to find another way of enhancing their students' performance in K.C.S.E. These efforts have resulted into joint examinations that bring together schools in a District or region just replacing directly the mock exams. In addition, the continuous assessment tests (CATS) are still prevalent. They are normally set by

teachers at school and done on a monthly basis or at the end of term. Schools in western Kenya have also come up with partnership examinations. This is where two or three schools come together in a given subject to set, administer and mark the examinations together. This is meant to remove bias and create objectivity. They then rank all form four students as per all the schools involved.

This has become the trend, where many secondary schools in Western Kenya are moving towards partnership in assessment. It was therefore imperative to study these partnership exams and establish the views of stakeholders who include teachers, learners, administrators and education officers and find out whether they have a common goal.

### **Statement of the problem**

The K.C.S.E. examinations are used in the selection and placement of students. The results form the basis for decisions about the future academic as well as career life of students. This mentality has taken root in the Kenyan society and one cannot be admitted to good programme without good K.C.S.E. results. Success in life is pegged on what one scores at K.C.S.E. However, performance in K.C.S.E. varies from one school to another; some schools perform very well and even send almost all students to institutions of higher learning while others perform poorly sending none. K.C.S.E. is taken as the only stepping-stone to success or prosperity in life and a good school is looked at in terms of how well it performs and the number of students that it can take to the university. Schools in western region have come together to partner in assessing their students as a way of preparing them for K.C.S.E. The partnership exams have attracted many schools, which are coming together with an aim of assessing their students jointly. The partnership examination involves teachers, students, administrators and education officers. However, since their inception they had no reports of any resistance from any of the stakeholders. It is for this reason that this research set out to establish the views of the different stakeholders towards these exams and whether they share the same goal and perspectives.

### **Objective**

The objective of the study was to find out the goals and perspectives of students, teachers, school administrators and education officers towards Partnership in Secondary School Assessment Exams in Kenya Western region.

### **Research question**

The paper was guided by the following research question:

What are the goals and perspectives of teachers, students, school administrators and education officers towards Partnership in Secondary School Assessment Exams in Western region Secondary Schools?

## **METHODOLOGY**

This study was descriptive in design and the intra-national case study method was used. The study used a mixed method with a bias on qualitative perspective to analyze data. The data collected was used to describe the existing conditions in partnership in secondary school assessment as compared to K.C.S.E. As put by Cohen and Marizon (2000), the method enables a researcher to gather data at a particular point in time and use it to describe the nature of the existing conditions. The K.C.S.E. performance was the dependent variable while partnership in secondary school assessment was the independent variable.

The study sites included secondary schools in the western region of Kenya where Partnership in Assessment took place. The schools are found in four counties namely: Bungoma, Busia, Vihiga and Kakamega. The study focused on schools in Busia, Kakamega and Vihiga counties. This area was chosen due to the prevalence of partnership exams (NYAKAIKA and NYABUTIMU). As well, western region has a very big population of approximately 4.334 million and a literacy level of 50.2%. Poverty level in Vihiga County is at 62%, Kakamega 57% and Busia 66%. Their major source of income is farming of sugar cane and maize. This has made them turn to education as their only hope for a better future. Equally, Western region has quite a number of very big and well performing schools.

### **Target population and sampling procedures**

At the time of the study, there were 697 secondary schools in Western region (MOE, 2012). The schools are approved and registered with the Ministry of Education in Kenya. There were 682 government sponsored secondary schools and 15 private schools in the region. These are post primary institutions of education established within the Kenyan system of education and designed to offer programs preparing students for K.C.S.E. This study focused on schools with a long tradition of good performance, high student population and participation in partnership assessments.

The researcher used purposive sampling to identify the schools. Given that not all schools took part in partnership exams, only those that were involved were considered. In addition, the researcher targeted schools involved in two sets of exams namely NYAKAIKA (Nyang'ori, Kaimosi, and Kakamega) and NYABUTIMU (Nyang'ori, Butula, and Mukumu) because these two sets

of partnership had been in existence for a period of over five years. The six schools involved in NYAKAIKA and NYABUTIMU were selected.

The schools are located in different counties: Nyang'ori boys and Kaimosi girls are in Vihiga County found on the southern part of Western region, bordering Nandi and Kisumu Counties. Kakamega boys and Mukumu girls are in Kakamega County which is located in the central part of Western region while Butula boys is in Busia county on the eastern of Western region, bordering Siaya, Uganda and Lake Victoria.

The composition of the population in the six sampled schools included; 6 principals, 285 teachers, 1333 students, 68 heads of departments and 3 county education directors giving a total of 1695 resource persons. Ideally, the inquiry should have involved all the 1695 resource persons but this population was large and wide spread. Application of research instruments to each person was likely to pose administrative and financial problems hence the need for a smaller sample of information resource persons.

### **Sampling procedure**

Since the investigation was aimed at getting a holistic and in depth view of the area of partnership in secondary school assessment, the informants were sampled from the six secondary schools selected for the study.

Out of a total population of 1695 identified as resource persons in the six schools, the researcher sampled 177 resource persons as informants. According to Mugenda and Mugenda (2003), one may use a sample size of at least 10%, but for better and more representative results, a higher percentage is better. For purposes of representation, 10% (150 students) of the total population of students (1563 students) was sampled from the population. Twelve (29.27%) form four teachers were sampled out of the total population of 41 teachers. Six heads of schools, three County directors of education and six heads of departments; those involved in NYAKAIKA and NYABUTIMU, were also sampled. This was in line with the case study procedures that require inclusion of all respondents that can provide the necessary information required in a research. Because schools had different student and teacher populations, stratified random sampling was used to determine the number of teachers and students per school (Table 1).

### ***Heads of Institutions (Principals)***

There were six heads of institutions selected as respondents from all six schools in the sample. This was because the principals were very critical in providing the necessary information required in the study. Further, this was in line with the case study procedures that required

**Table 1.** Categories of sampled informants.

Institution	Heads of Institutions	Heads of Departments	Teachers	Students	CDE	Total
Kakamega	1	1	3	30	1	30
Nyang'ori	2	2	4	44		58
Kaimosi	1	1	2	27	1	30
Butula	1	1	1	20	1	30
Mukumu	1	1	2	29		29
Total	6	6	12	150	3	177

inclusion of all respondents that could provide the necessary information.

### **Heads of Departments (H.O.D.s)**

These were the teachers in charge of the various departments in a school. Only one Head of Department was purposively selected since partnership exams were at subject level and did not always involve all departments. So the head of that department that had taken part in the named partnership exams (NYAKAIKA or NYABUTIMU) was selected.

### **Teaching Staff**

These were the teachers who taught in the six selected schools. Random sampling was used to select two teachers per school in those departments involved in partnership exams. The names of all the form four teachers in the departments involved in NYAKAIKA or NYABUTIMU in each school were written on pieces of paper, put in a bowl, thoroughly mixed and two selected randomly.

### **Students**

Twenty-five students were randomly selected. Only form four students were selected since partnership exams were only done by form fours. Students were arranged on a list based on the class register and assigned numbers ranging from one up to the total number of form fours in a school. The  $n$ th number was reached by dividing the form four populations in a school by 25, which was the sample number of students needed in each school. Based on the list every  $n$ th number was selected for inclusion in the sample.

### **Education Officers**

The six sampled schools are located in three Counties

namely Kakamega, Vihiga and Busia. All the three County directors of education were interviewed to provide an insight into the Ministry's policy on evaluation and their views towards Partnership in Secondary School Assessment.

### **Data analysis**

A mixed method with a bias of qualitative data analysis approaches were used in the study. Descriptive statistics such as percentages were used to explain issues. The information gotten from interviews and questionnaires was used to explain the views of teachers, students, principals, Heads of Departments and Education Officers. The verbatim responses from teachers, students, education officers and principals have been coded for confidentiality purposes.

## **RESULTS**

### **Stakeholders' views on partnership in secondary school assessment**

The students were asked whether they liked the partnership exams. After analysis, 35.3% indicated that they were not interested, while 64.7% indicated they were. Further, they were expected to explain why they liked or disliked these exams. Those who indicated they liked them explained that the Partnership Exams helped them realize where they really were academically, gauge their ability and know if they were ready for the final K.C.S.E. examination. They used them to identify whether they were weak and the topics they had not covered well, and then did a lot of revision in those areas. According to the students, this was a wakeup call to them. These exams also exposed them to a variety of questions widening their revision scope. They said that they had to read, practice and do everything in an extraordinary way to beat their opponents in the partnership exams. One student wrote:

"You may think that you are the best but once beaten by somebody from another school you go back to re-read

and defeat him/her in K.C.S.E. hence revising harder" (STF1)

The students as well revised all the available papers in preparation for partnership exams because it was embarrassing for one's name to appear among the last in the partner schools. This is because the lists of the results were posted on notice boards in all the schools. Competition among students from different schools also made them work hard unlike within the school. They kept comparing notes with their partners in terms of how to answer questions, how to revise and adopted what could help them improve. This was some sort of exposure to the candidates.

They also believed that the partnership exams helped them to be in an examination mood hence removing fear. The exams psyched them and built their confidence apart from breaking monotony from the normal school continuous assessment tests. Since this was an external exam, it enabled them to get used to external exams making K.C.S.E. appear like any other ordinary exam. However, those who said NO and were unwilling to continue with the partnership exams also had their reasons. They said the exams were very hard resulting into poor performance thus demoralizing and discouraging them from working hard since they felt that they could not perform better than that. When the results were released and posted on notice boards in the partner schools, they became embarrassed since their peers knew that they were academically weak. They also complained about marking which they claimed was biased and even felt that some schools leaked the exams to their students before the actual date of administration. Therefore, to them these partnership exams were not fair. Others were unhappy with their teachers because they never revised the exams, took too long to release results, and some questions were set from areas they had not covered, since some schools finished their syllabus quite late in the year.

Of the entire teachers, 94.4% indicated that the partnership exams were good, while 5.6% had reservations and did not like the exams. Those who said they were good argued that the exams were, whistle blowers, because they assisted them know their students areas of weakness early enough and therefore focus their energies on those areas for better results. The exams were diagnostic in nature. A head of department said:

"Teachers always assume that they have good students when they compete amongst themselves in school. Once a partnership exam is done and they perform dismally in comparison to other schools that is when they realize that something must be done" (HODF4).

Since the setting of partnership, examinations focused on areas crucial for exams while marking involved a keen observation of the students' responses to establish weaknesses. Teachers as well had an opportunity to identify other areas they needed to put more emphasis and where they may have not covered well for re-teaching in preparation for K.C.S.E.

Partnership exams also gave teachers an opportunity to learn from each other. They come together during setting and marking and shared ideas and experiences plus the challenges faced in the subjects and how to tackle them. It was a learning session for teachers. They also exchanged ideas on how best to prepare candidates for K.C.S.E. Some of the teachers were senior KNEC examiners and they used this opportunity to teach their colleagues how to mark and set standard exams. The teachers were in agreement that after a joint exam they emerged more informed on issues they did not know or had overlooked in the past.

Teachers further indicated that this was a great opportunity for them to interact with their competitors and know what they did that they may not be doing. They learnt from each other and improved on their weaknesses. They also felt that these exams made their students read more and widely because they feared being defeated by the partner schools especially if they were of the opposite sex. Therefore, students seemed to prepare more for partnership exams than the internal school exams. The students were also exposed to a variety of questions and through revision they learnt how to tackle them and some tips on how to answer K.C.S.E. questions were also passed to them. Basically, teachers believed that these partnership exams had great benefits to students.

The other group of teachers that comprised of 5.6% had reservations towards partnership exams. They complained that the work was too much and yet nobody seemed to appreciate their efforts. They viewed partnership exams as extra-exams and therefore could not substitute the internal exams. Teachers were expected to set, administer and mark school internal exams and partnership exams at the same time. Sometimes they marked partnership exams late into the night and over weekends yet nothing was forth coming in terms of remuneration. Thus, they felt this was too much work that went unappreciated. They also complained that sometimes they left marking centres very late without means of transport to their homes yet they relied on the fare given at school, which was not enough to hire a vehicle. According to them the school administration only thought of the students' results and no mechanism was put in place to assist and ensure the comfort of teachers in the partnership exams. One teacher wrote:

"We mark up to 9.00 pm. Then use public means back to our houses. At this time there are no vehicles, the few available have hiked their fares. We are given the exact fare without an allowance for fluctuation of prices. A lunch of 250 shillings is not enough. Sometimes we spend our own money. This exercise is more of a punishment to teachers" (TCHM7).

The views of principals were sought and all of them (100%) were in support of the partnership exams although with reservations. They felt this was one of the best ways to prepare candidates for K.C.S.E. The principal of one of the School noted that since his school

begun to participate in the partnership exams, the mean kept on improving from 8.3 in 2008 and 2009. The mean increased slightly to 8.8 in 2010 and further increased to 9.3 and 9.6 in 2011 and 2012 respectively. They felt that the partnership exams promoted competition among schools hence making students work hard. Students were psyched and wanted to prove to each other that they were good academically. In the process they read widely and intensively in preparation for the partnership exams thus helping them revise for K.C.S.E.

The principals also highlighted that through partnership exams teachers were able to point out weaknesses in their students. They could then revise or re-teach those areas as one principal commented:

“The exam is not an end in itself but a means to achieving the desired end” (PF1)

Teachers can use these exams to isolate areas that were poorly done and revise them while putting more emphasis. This can also enable them to know how prepared their students were. Therefore, the partnership exams were good because they were well set. Equally these exams provided a variation in setting and marking avoiding the ‘hallow effect’. Thus enabling teachers and students to have a feel of what was set and marked by other people before K.C.S.E. They were also a source of exposure to both the teachers and students’. They learnt from each other new tricks that could help them excel. They included aspects like exam tricks, question answering techniques and even how to teach certain topics for easier understanding by students are discussed. The sessions bring together teachers with varied experiences and knowledge. Some were examiners while others had long teaching experience.

However, the administrators had reservations on a few areas. First, they complained about time wastage, which occurred during setting and marking. All teachers in a department had to leave school to join their partners in setting and later in marking partnership exams. These activities take several days. Therefore, students are not taught for three to four days in each subject per term. One Principal noted that:

“These exams consume a lot of time and if not controlled they may be counterproductive. Imagine if a whole department goes setting and marking for several days. How will they recover the lost lessons? We need to be very cautious with this thing.” (PM3)

Secondly, the exams are expensive on the side of the school since they involved many movements. The teachers travelled from their schools to go and set and mark while the host partner school was to cater for meals and refreshments. Therefore, it was not a free affair. Principals felt that with time they may be forced to introduce a levy to cater for the expenses if all subjects were to partner in assessment. Lastly the release of results is sometimes delayed and even some teachers never revised the exams. Therefore the exams could not

achieve the intended purpose. An example was given where a partnership exam was done in March and results released in July. This was after a very long period of time (5 months) and therefore the exam had lost its usefulness. The principals noted that there was need to have clear timelines on setting and marking for effectiveness.

The three County directors of education were aware of the existence of Partnership in Secondary School Assessment Exams. They indicated that many schools in their counties engaged in partnership exams. However, the exams were limited to the big schools and those that performed well academically. Therefore, not all the schools in the counties took part in partnership exams. They felt the examinations were good because they provided a forum for revision, exposure to the students and build their confidence in preparation for K.C.S.E. The students revised as many questions as possible in preparation for partnership exams and eventually K.C.S.E. Equally, the confidence of students was more developed because as they sit for these exams which were external they were better placed to sit for K.C.S.E. The partnership exams also provided a forum for exposure and sharing of ideas for teachers. Teachers learnt new ideas and reminded themselves of what they may have forgotten. This is in line with what the teachers, principals and student have earlier indicated. As it was noted by a County Director of Education:

“Excellence is not got in isolation; Schools must come together and assist each other in charting their academic course.” (EOF2)

On the other hand, they also cautioned against over testing. Partnership exams should be set and administered within the stipulated education policies. The government policy on education in terms of student evaluation allows the school administration together with the Board of management in consultation with the education officers to determine how best to evaluate their students and at what interval (Kenya Republic of 2013). As well the curriculum and syllabus for each subject advises on how to assess students. Therefore, they advised that the exams should be set and offered in such a way that they do not promote rote learning and abandonment of all the other skills. One County Director of Education noted:

“The students are to acquire lifelong skills apart from passing exams. Over testing may interfere with other skills since students will put 99% of their time on preparing for the exams at the expense of sports, music, drama and life skills.” (EOM1)

Therefore, they felt that this evaluation should be well organized to allow students engage in other activities and at the same time prepare for K.C.S.E.

## DISCUSSION

The findings indicated that 74.7% of the students liked

the partnership exams and 64.7% were willing to continue doing them. They noted that the exams helped them realize their strengths and weaknesses. These made them do more revision and reading to strengthen their strength and eliminate their weaknesses. It was also an opportunity for exposure particularly to questions, ways of answering and how marking was done. The fear of failure and being ranked among the last made them work hard. As well the feel of an exam not set by their teachers build their confidence in preparation for K.C.S.E. Therefore the exams were a very good way of preparing for K.C.S.E. However, those who were uncomfortable felt the exams were hard, embarrassing and a discouragement especially when all students' were ranked and made public in all the partner schools. As well they complained of poor and biased marking, lack of revision and late release of results were a discouragement to the students. These issues made some students' feel the partnership exams were not good. Consequently not every student was in agreement that partnership in assessment was the best way to go. Another group comprising of 25.3% did not like the exam while 35.3% were unwilling to continue with the partnership examinations. This raises a big question as to whether these exams were the best way to prepare candidates for K.C.S.E. The role of the teachers in setting question in respect to what they have covered in class and the syllabus coverage comes into question since schools do not cover the syllabus at the same time. This is in line with Kananu (2012) as cited by Amadalo et al. (2012) found that there was inadequate syllabus coverage in Kenyan public schools and whatever was covered was not done effectively, leading to poor performance in many subjects. This is further supported by Kasembeli and Gathara (2014), Polesel et al. (2012) that when testing, teachers should set what they have taught.

On the other hand, 94.4% of the teachers were supportive of the partnership exams. They looked at them as whistle blowers that assisted them identify their students varied abilities. After syllabus completion they could know through their students' performance in partnership exams, which areas required to be re-taught or revised. This is in confirmation of what Amadalo et al. (2012) indicated that schools which cover the syllabus early have time to put in place a series of measures that will ensure good performance. They also provided an opportunity for teachers to learn from each other since they had varied experiences in setting, marking and even teaching. Out of this sharing they emerged more enlightened to prepare their candidates for K.C.S.E. They also felt that these exams made their students read more and revise extensively hence widening their scope of coverage. The teachers who were against these exams pointed out several issues which included; partnership exams were too much work which went unappreciated. The exams were administered outside the normal school

testing programs yet no appreciation was forth coming. There was also no motivation and support to the teachers involved. The principals were only interested in the welfare of students and good results but not teachers. They had to sacrifice and even spend their own money yet these were school programs. This is a clear indication that these examinations although approved by a higher percentage of teachers still remain controversial and unacceptable to some. Though the goal is one, teachers have different perspectives in respect to partnership examinations in the western region.

All the principals felt that partnership exams were the best way to evaluate candidates in preparation for K.C.S.E. They noted that the subject means have kept on improving after the inception of these exams although with fluctuations. The exams promoted competition among students, which culminated into a lot of reading and revision. In fact they viewed students' as reading more while preparing for partnership exams than for internal school exams. These exams presented an opportunity for teachers and students to identify their weaknesses, revise and share ideas on what was to be done to avoid such mistakes in future. It was an exam that provided an opportunity for self-reflection to students and teachers on where they were academically and what was to be done to assist them go where they were going in terms of performance. However, there were shortfalls noted in the partnership exams like time wastage, during setting and marking, the cost of sustaining these exams was too high, and delays in the marking and release of results. The concerns raised could make the use of these exams counterproductive.

The education officers felt that the exams were good in preparing form four students for K.C.S.E. They supported the sentiments that were raised by teacher and principals. Thus it was felt that this was one of the best ways of preparing candidates for K.C.S.E. However, they advised that caution should be exercised to avoid over testing and encouragement of rote learning among the students. Time should be created for students to engage in other activities like sports, music and drama so that the education system develops an all round person.

## Conclusion

Based on this study, it can be concluded that a high percentage of teachers, students and Education officials were in support of the partnership examinations. The examinations have a single goal in terms of preparing candidates for K.C.S.E. This may be done by enabling students to revise, build confidence, develop exam techniques and learn new issues that they may not have been covered. Frequent testing is very essential especially for candidates preparing for a final examination. These will accord them an opportunity to measure their preparedness for the national

examinations. It is more significant and of value when the exam is set by a panel comprising people with varied experiences. Equally the marking is more standard than what is marked by the everyday schoolteacher. There is a lot of objectivity in these partnership examinations and have a single goal in preparing K.C.S.E. candidates.

On the contrary, a reasonable number of respondents were uncomfortable with the partnership examinations. The teachers, students, principals, heads of departments and education officers had reservations about these examinations. There were complains about failure to mark, revise, delay in releasing results, poor planning, lack of support from the school administration, financial implications, too much work and a tendency to over-test at the expense of other skills. These issues are quite weighty because they may hinder the effectiveness of these partnership examinations. The examinations may achieve their expected purpose of assisting students attain good K.C.S.E. results on one side while negatively affecting other areas or people involved. The teachers may end up suffering, students be overworked and over-tested, parents to pay more for the examinations and the end product a student with very high grades but not creative or unable to use their knowledge. Therefore caution should be taken not just to rush and adopt the examinations but to address these divergent views raised by the stakeholders.

It is clear that partnership exams have attracted a numbers of schools and seem appealing to everybody. However caution should be exercised and the different views raised by different stakeholders addressed to make the partnership exams more effective. The exams must be marked, revised, results released on time, proper planning done in advance, support from the school administration given, source for more funds, incorporation of other skills and motivation of the parties involved. If the issues raised are addressed then partnership examinations may be beneficial as a way of preparing K.C.S.E. candidates. This is in line with the Social Comparison theory where individuals and groups will compete to achieve better ranking than their competitors. This will make all the concerned stakeholders have similar goals in preparation of the students geared to K.C.S.E. performance.

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