Research article

DEVELOPMENT OF THE PRIMARY AND SECONDARY EDUCATION SYSTEM IN THE REPUBLIC OF KENYA (1963–2022)

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Abstract. The article is devoted to the study of the development of the education system in the Republic of Kenya from 1963 to 2022. In a rapidly changing world and growing social demands, the country's education system has undergone significant changes. The article analyzes the key stages and reforms of education policy in the Republic of Kenya, starting with Independence and the reforms undertaken by the first President, Jomo Kenyatta, and ending with the work of the government of President Uhuru Kenyatta. Special attention is paid to the main achievements in the field of education, such as increasing access to basic education, creating programs to improve the quality of education, and introducing modern technologies into the educational process. The problems and challenges faced by the education system are analyzed, including inequality in access to education for various segments of the population and teaching staff shortages. The arguments are supported by statistical data from the UNESCO UIS database, the World Inequality Database on Education (WISE), reports from the Ministry of Education of Kenya, as well as examples of successful initiatives at the level of public and private institutions. In the article, the author presents a regional review of Kenya's key education policy and legislative framework and of the existing research on the quantity and quality of primary education in the country, highlighting the importance of educational reforms for the socio-economic development of Kenya. The study focused on issues of quality education in the light of the achievements of Education for All (EFA) and Universal primary education (UPE). It analyzed the problems associated with the increase in primary school enrollment and their subsequent impact on the quality of education in Kenya.

Keywords: Kenya, education, Kenyan education, primary and secondary education, Harambee schools

Conflict of interest: The author declared that there is no conflict of interest.

Acknowledgements: The author acknowledges the helpful comments of the Editorial Board, peer reviewers, and several colleagues from Africa.

DOI: 10.31132/2412-5717-2025-71-2-58-74

For citation: Rakhmatullin Sh.D. (2025). Development of the Primary and Secondary Education System in the Republic of Kenya (1963–2022). *Journal of the Institute for African Studies*. Vol. 11. № 2. Pp. 58–74. https://doi.org/10.31132/2412-5717-2025-71-2-58-74

INTRODUCTION

Education in Kenya has been actively studied in Russian historiography since the early 2000s. There are works on the subject of the colonial history of the development of education [Gribanova 2020; Karpov 2023]; works analyzing the impact of economic factors on the quality of education in Kenya based on statistical data [Hideg 2021]; works considering the educational system and healthcare [Gribanova, Ponomareva 2018; Matveeva 2004]; works studying the accessibility of education, as well as initiatives of the local population (*harambee* schools [Matveeva 2013]), reforms aimed at improving the quality of education, introducing new technologies, and updating curricula [Chepkirui 2011]; works updating the concept of "Collective Self-Reliance" (CSR) in view of the formation of a multipolar world [Degterev 2024].

The same situation can be seen in foreign historiography, which is mainly focused on particular aspects of education in Kenya. For example, there are publications on ethnic inequality in education in Kenya [Alwy, Schech 2004]; examining the history of education of nomadic peoples [Carr-Hill, Peart 2005]; analyzing education reform policies and their assessment [Imana 2020]; and addressing the impact of information and communication technologies on the educational process [Kirimi 2014]; as well as works aimed at the analysis of educational reforms, their assessment, and recommendations [Mackatiani, Ariemba, Ngware 2020; Muricho, Chang'ach 2013; Odebero 2007].

The main source of information for this paper was office records and regulations, as well as reports from the Government of the Republic of Kenya and the Ministry of Education of Kenya covering their activities for the period 1963–2022. The documents provide an assessment of existing educational structures, disadvantages, and problems related to the quality and accessibility of education, the development of students' individual abilities, their preparation for the workforce, and the cultivation in them of civic responsibility. They also offer recommendations on the implementation of reforms aimed at improving the educational system.

TO ELIMINATE THE "THREE ENEMIES OF DEVELOPMENT": EDUCATION REFORM UNDER PRESIDENT JOMO KENYATTA

The country's history is very dramatic: indigenous peoples, deprived of their legal rights during the long colonial period, sought to acquire them; most Kenyan children did not have access to education; the colonial authorities in every possible way restricted the rights of indigenous peoples living in their territories. This manifested in racial discrimination, in particular, when allocating the places in schools and funding the construction of educational institutions.

In 1963, immediately after independence, the Kenyan government vowed to eliminate or reduce the scale of the three "enemies of development": poverty, illiteracy, and disease [Imana 2020; Muricho, Chang'ach 2013]. This program was aimed at providing education and improving the well-being of underprivileged citizens. Overcoming these problems was important for the young republic, which needed skilled labor to improve its economic situation.

At the time of the declaration of its independence on December 12, 1963, Kenya had significant disparities in school infrastructure. According to statistics by the Ministry of Education, there were 5,058 primary schools and 151 secondary schools at that time [Eshiwani 1990]. Education for the indigenous people was mainly initiated by local communities and councils of the indigenous peoples, such as Kamba and Kikuyu, in *Harambee*[1] schools or by church groups and some non-governmental organizations. These groups were the main providers of primary and secondary education for the local citizens before the declaration of independence [Matveeva 2013].

An important feature of the Kenyan education system is its funding by local communities. Such support is evident in the form of *Harambee* schools. The roots of the Kenyan *Harambee* movement go back to colonial times and embody the idea of mutual assistance, the participation of each member of society in the solution of pressing problems and overcoming disparities in access to social services, such as education and health care.

The term is found in the languages of many ethnoses of Kenya: the Luo call it *Konyir Rende*, the Luhya—*Obwasio*, the Kikuyu—*Ngwatio*, the Kamba—*Mwethia*, and the Masai—Ematonyok. It is estimated that Harambee self-help, especially in rural areas of Kenya, accounted for more than 30% of development investments, a unique phenomenon based on local social institutions [Mwiria 1990; Mbithi, Rasmusson 1977]. This concept existed prior to the emergence of ideological calls for independent development—a Self-Reliance policy that relied on local social institutions and was based on the "bottom-up" approach, functioning with little financial support from the government, and sometimes without it altogether.

The characteristic trait of the Kenyan *Harambee* movement was its highly politicized nature during the early period of independence. Politicians, who sought to win over voters, actively directed their efforts to organize self-help both inside and outside their constituencies. This concept became a national motto and appeared on the national coat of arms on *Madaraka Day*[2] in 1963, when the first President of Kenya, Jomo Kenyatta (1964–1978), officially proclaimed it a state policy [Mbithi, Rasmusson 1977].

Independence was a pivotal moment in the provision of education, especially for the native population of Kenya. The departure of the colonial administration and the growth of the urban sector led to the beginning of the process of decolonization in the field of education, the emergence of employment opportunities for Kenyans with formal education. A goal was set to guarantee all citizens equal access to education and participation in the governance of the country. Law on Education No. 211 of 1968 was a legal document containing general provisions aimed at eliminating racial discrimination in the educational system and nationalizing the educational process. This was part of the Kenyan Government's overall policy of creating equal opportunities for all citizens, regardless of their race or ethnicity.

[1] *Harambee* means "all pull together" in Swahili. Since 1965, a Movement for the construction of secondary «Harambee Schools» (*Harambee Secondary School Movement*) began to develop spontaneously in the country, mainly in economically more developed central Kenya, where residents are engaged in commercial agricultural production.

[2] Madaraka Day ("Internal Self–Rule Day" or "Self-Governance Day") is a national holiday celebrated annually on June 1 in the Republic of Kenya. On this day in 1963, Kenya gained internal self-rule after being a British colony since 1920.

The commitment of the international community to address this issue played an important role in this. Many reforms were initiated thanks to the first African Conference on the Development of education in 1961 [Gribanova 2020: 72]. African leaders met in Addis Ababa with the joint sponsorship of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA) and agreed to achieve universal primary education.

In order to implement this initiative, the Kenyan Government launched an educational development plan (1964–1970), which focused on enrollment of children in schools, building new schools, and provision of primary education. President Jomo Kenyatta introduced a free primary education program in 1974 and also abolished fees for the first four years of education.

Nevertheless, the significant increase in school construction, the remuneration of teaching staff, and the development of educational programs fell on the shoulders of *Harambee* activists and parent councils, whose goal was to ensure the welfare of their children. The authorities have shifted monetary expenses to the *Harambee* movement, limiting the scope of public financing. The funds were provided exclusively for the development of public educational institutions in the central regions. All semi-arid and arid regions had very low academic achievement rates. Almost all children attended primary school in Muranga and Kiambu, and primary school enrollment in the Central Province was about 20% of the total population, while in the North Eastern Province it was 8% and in the Rift Valley Province it was only 1% [Mbithi, Rasmusson 1977].

Most of the primary and secondary educational institutions in rural areas were *Harambee* schools, which were established, funded, and managed by local communities. The management of most *Harambee* schools was mainly in the hands of local leaders, primary and secondary school teachers, and clergy. These people formed local committees responsible for the fundraising, hiring teachers, and organization of the educational process. The *Harambee* movement provided more than 40% of total national spending on education development and controlled more than 62% of all secondary schools in the country [Mwiria 1990].

By 1966, the number of community-run and community-funded schools (*Harambee* schools) had increased from 199 to 226. In 1967, the Government began to provide assistance to *Harambee* schools [Matveeva 2004; Matveeva 2013], paying for teachers' training to improve their skills. The Ministry of Education recognized the special role of these schools in its annual report for 1968, which noted: "Without the Harambee effort the rate of growth of secondary school places would not have grown as fast as it has"[3]. By 1973, there were about 600 schools of this type in the country, compared with 381 public schools, according to the Ministry of Education. The report also noted that out of 180,000 secondary school students, about 80,000 attended *Harambee* schools. More than 70% of the schools receiving aid were former *Harambee* schools[4].

The first reforms in the field of education were based on the 1964 Ominde report[5]. The document noted the importance of the transformation of the national education system from a colonial system to one that would promote national unity and

[3] Annual Report. *Ministry of Education.* Nairobi: Government Printer, 1968. P.4

[4] Education celebrates Uhuru. Nairobi: Government Printer. *Jomo Kenyatta Foundation,* 1973. https://openlibrary.org/works/OL7086407W/Education_celebrates_Uhuru (accessed: 26.02.2025)

[5] The document prepared a commission led by Kenyan economist James Ominde, which contained recommendations for reforming the colonial education system.

development. This report marked the end of the system of racial segregation in education. The Ominde commission has provided scholarships to African students for admission to former European and Asian schools [Imana 2020].

In 1966, the Kenya Institute of Education (KIE), predecessor of the Kenya Institute of Curriculum Development (KICD), introduced a unified curriculum and unified exams. From 1967 to 1984, Republic of Kenya had a 7-4-2-3 education model, which included seven years of primary education, four years of secondary education, a further two years of higher secondary school or vocational colleges, and university studies, the duration of which depended on the chosen program (most often, from three to five years).

The transition to the next level of education was controlled through examinations. In primary school, students took the exam to get the *East African Certificate of Primary Education (EACPE)*. Students received a certificate of general education after successfully passing the *East African Certificate of Education* (*EACE*) Examination after 4 years of secondary school or obtained the *East African Advanced Certificate of Education* (*EAACE*) after 2 years of higher secondary school. Further, on the basis of the rating-point system, students had the opportunity to choose a university for further studying and obtaining a higher education diploma. The East African Certificate of Education replaced *the Cambridge School Certificate* (O-Level); the East African Certificate of Advanced Education replaced *the Cambridge Certificate of Advanced School Education* (A-Level).

It is worth noting that the reforms presented in the report of James Ominde have been criticized over time for the Commission's failure to address the main issues related to the expansion and sufficient enrollment of children in public educational institutions. The education system instilled "Western" thinking, forming individualism among school graduates, incompatible with African collectivism.

In order to solve the problem of management in the educational sector, President Jomo Kenyatta transferred the *Harambee* schools under the control of the Ministry of Education in 1969, made them public schools, and provided them with qualified teaching staff. The reform allowed for an increase in the number of public institutions and also solved the problem of underfunding *Harambee* schools. In 1975, the Government established a program to help *Harambee* schools, known as the "*Harambee Secondary Schools Package Program*".

Many of the measures taken have proved ineffective due to insufficient funds for the reform of the vast number of *Harambee* schools. There were concerns that government spending would be increased too much if the process of mass construction of *Harambee* schools, which was expected by local residents, continued (for example, in 1984 there were 1,466 *Harambee* schools, compared with 300 in 1970) [Mwiria 1990].

In order to reduce the desire of local communities to create new educational institutions, the Government has declared it illegal for any group of individuals to build schools without the approval of the Ministry of Education. In addition, local communities had to raise at least 40,000 Kenyan shillings (about $2,500) before opening a school, which was a huge amount of money at that time. As a result, the large *Harambee* movement lost its power, and the Ministry of Education began the process of nationalization of all educational institutions through reforms. Most of the *Harambee* schools were integrated into the national system in 1974, but unevenly, since it was the

central province that benefited most from these transformations, strengthening the already dense network of schools in the region [Hornsby 2013: 138-140].

Despite the results achieved, during the presidency of J. Kenyatta, education system faced serious challenges, including a shortage of teachers, insufficient funding, and poor-quality education. There have been significant criticisms of the 7-4-2-3 education system. The discussion focused on the curriculum, which lacked flexibility and the ability to adapt to the changing needs of citizens and the labor market [Mackatiani, Ariemba, Ngware 2020].

For the most part, the curriculum remained Eurocentric. Obviously, the Ominde Commission, established by the Kenyan Government to promote the decolonization of education immediately after independence, provided good recommendations. However, very little has changed in terms of the curriculum, educational structure, and language of instruction.

The reforms did not take into account the development of rural areas, where the vast majority of Kenyans lived—a critical mistake that was repeated in subsequent years. Many students could not complete the transition from elementary school to secondary school due to a lack of parental finances, and unemployment increased due to the fact that the labor market could not accept even those who graduated from high school.

In 1976, the situation was analyzed in a report by the Commission on Education of Peter Joseph Gachathi (the Gachathi report). The issue of unemployment was raised in it: "One of the largest problems confronting the country is that of unemployment. This problem is aggravated by the annual output of school-leavers whose numbers continue to swell following the enormous expansion of the education system in the first ten years of independence"[6]. These challenges became apparent in the late 1980s, which led to the need for further reforms.

EDUCATION REFORMS UNDER PRESIDENT DANIEL ARAP MOI: FROM THE "BOTTOM-UP" PROCESS TOWARDS A "TOP-DOWN" POLICY

The next President of Kenya, Daniel Arap Moi (1978–2002), noticed that he would follow in the footsteps of J. Kenyatta, implementing the *Fuata Nyayo*[7] policy. Nevertheless, "African socialism" and its basic principles underwent revision, which also affected the education sector. Moi's policy had shifted towards authoritarianism and neoliberal reforms. This resulted in a formal expansion of the access to education but also in a decline in quality, the politicization of schools, and rising inequality. President Moi continued to develop the primary and secondary education program; however, the changes were not so significant. *Harambee* schools' development projects became less important. The nature of politics had undergone a transformation from a "bottom–up" process to a "top-down" process. In 1970–1980, the greater need for educational institutions due to the increase in population did not solve the problem of the funding of public schools. In 1980–2000, key policy reforms were developed and implemented,

[6] Report of the National Committee on educational objectives (Gachathi Report). Government Printer. *Ministry of Education*. 1976. P. 34. https://academia-ke.org/library/download/report-of-the-national-committee-on-educational-objectives-and-policies-the-gachathi-report-1976/ (accessed: 07.03.2025)

[7] From Swahili Fuata Nyayo —"following someone's footsteps."

which can be traced in the reports of Mackay[8] in 1981, Kamuge[9] in 1988, and Koech[10] in 1999.

A notable reform was the establishment in 1980 of *The Kenya National Examinations Council* (*KNEC*) to organize and monitor the conduct of exams in primary, secondary, and some higher education institutions. The Council was necessary to ensure their quality and fairness, and to control the internal certification process. Kenya started issuing official certificates that were recognized at home and abroad, and introduced a unified database of results.

In 1981, the presidential commission for the establishment of the second national University in Kenya (in accordance with the Mackay report) recommended changing the educational model and switching to the 8-4-4 system: eight years of primary education, four years of secondary education, and four years of higher education. This new educational system was adopted in 1985. It was mainly aimed at developing students' basic skills for their future jobs and was supposed to solve the problem of high unemployment. More emphasis was placed on the literacy and numeracy skills, as well as on streamlining exams and raising educational standards and trust in the system.

The introduction of the 8-4-4 educational system also made economic sense. The fact is that Western countries and international organizations, such as the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF), as well as donor countries, provided financial support for educational reforms in developing countries, including Kenya. This support was often accompanied by recommendations for reforming the educational system in accordance with the Western standards. In the case of the 8-4-4 model, Kenya took the American model of education as a basis and adapted it to local realities in order to receive stable financial support [Muricho, Chang'ach 2013].

At the same time, the new 8-4-4 system was described as complex and did not take into account the cultural traits of Kenyans. It was characterized by a high degree of exam difficulty. The inability to score the required number of points for admission to universities and mid-level colleges meant that students would not be able to study in the fields they dreamed of, leaving them in a status of unemployed.

In the years following the adoption of this system, school enrollment rates remained high, but dropout rates remained equally high: 45.5% of the students who entered school in 1979 left school in their fifth year of primary school. Due to staff shortages, the teacher-pupil ratio dropped significantly, from 1:33 to almost 1:40 [Somerset 2007]. The extension of primary school education by one year, from 7 to 8 years, required the construction of 13,370 new classrooms and additional equipment for technical and agricultural disciplines (laboratories, workshops, etc.) [Charton 2021].

[8] Report of presidential working party on the establishment of second university (Mackay Report). Government Printer. *Ministry of education.* 1981. http://libraryir.parliament.go.ke/items/066f6f43-8141-4e78-b257-b0fd51eef724 (accessed: 26.02.2025)

[9] The presidential working party on education and manpower training for the next decade and beyond (the Kamunge Commission). Government printer. *Ministry of Education.* 1988. https://academia-ke.org/library/download/report-of-the-presidential-working-party-on-education-and-manpower-training-for-the-next-decade-and-beyond-kamunge-report-march-1988/ (accessed: 26.02.2025)

[10] Report of the inquiry into the education system of Kenya (*TI QET*) (Koech report). Government Printer. *Ministry of Education.* 1999. https://uoeldkenya.wordpress.com/2017/05/17/koech-report-recommendations-19992000/ (accessed: 26.02.2025)

The costs were mostly paid by the parents due to the resumption of additional fees and the proliferation of the *Harambee* policy for the construction of new classrooms. Since 1983, educational institutions had stopped providing school supplies, and parents were officially responsible for equipment of children and classrooms. The emphasis on basic education since 1979, to the detriment of other levels, corresponded to the liberal approach of international organizations and the emergence of the first plans for structural adjustment [Charton 2021].

In 1988, a report by the Kamunge Education Commission recommended reducing the number of exam subjects due to the high workload on students under the new 8-4-4 model. Despite the innovations, many parents of students could not afford to pay for their children's education: formally, school education was free, but the high costs of uniforms, textbooks, accommodation, and transportation put a burden on the family budget, which was reflected in the low level of secondary school enrollment.

An important date was November 20, 1989, when the United Nations Assembly adopted the Convention on the Rights of the Child[11]. Article 28 of the Convention states that every child has the right to education, and primary school education should be compulsory and free for all. The World Conference on Education for All (EFA), held in Jomtien in 1990, addressed the issue of providing quality education and developed strategies to address this issue. The Republic of Kenya was recognized as one of the leading countries in the field of education[12].

Kenya was one of the first countries in Africa to adopt international standards in the field of education and to ratify some important documents, including the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child of July 11, 1990[13]. The Kenyan Parliament passed the Children Act in 2001. Section 7 (1) of this Act states that every child has the right to education, which is the responsibility of the Government and parents[14]. Unlike many countries that focus only on academic education, Kenya has introduced practical subjects (agriculture, crafts) into the school curriculum, which corresponded to the slogan "*Education for Self-Reliance*."

The concept of "Collective Self-Reliance" gained widespread popularity in the 1960s and 1980s in the context of national development strategies of several countries (primarily the Arusha Declaration of 1967 by J. Nyerere, 70% of the text of which is taken up by the section "Self–Reliance," presented in the format of worldly wisdom[15]). While the 1967 Arusha Declaration observed a reserved and negative attitude towards the institution of aid due to its conditionality, as the discourse evolved at the global level, transforming it into the agenda of the New International Economic Order, perceptions

[11] Convention on the Rights of the Child, 1989 (adopted by the Resolution 44/25). *UN*. https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/convention-rights-child (accessed: 02.02.2025)
[12] World declaration on education for all Meeting basic learning needs, 1990. *UNESCO*. https://www.un.org/ru/documents/decl_conv/declarations/pdf/jomtien.pdf (accessed: 06.02.2025)
[13] African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child, 1990. *African Union*. 1990. https://au.int/en/treaties/african-charter-rights-and-welfare-child (accessed: 25.03.2025)
[14] The Children Act, 2001 (No. 8 of 2001). Government Printer. *Ministry of Education*. 2001. https://www.socialprotection.go.ke/sites/default/files/Downloads/Children-Act-2001.pdf (accessed: 26.02.2025)
[15] *The Arusha Declaration*. 05.02.1967. https://www.maktaba.org/download/file/579/The_arusha_declaration_Julius_kambarage_nyerere.pdf (accessed: 08.05.2025)

changed. In the 1980s, it was stated that developed countries should provide aid to developing countries, which, of course, the former could not agree to [Degterev 2024].

The next decade (1990–2000) was the most difficult period for the country, as the economic crisis affected the financing of education. Shortly before that, in 1988, under pressure from the IMF and the World Bank, Kenya was forced to introduce tuition fees (cost-sharing). Many children stopped going to school between 1992 and 1994. The total number of students was decreased. The share of drop-outs increased from 36% in 1989 to 47% in 1999 [Fredriksen 2023; Inyega 2021].

One of the factors that led to a decrease in the quality of education was the introduction of a cost-sharing system in primary and secondary schools. Between 1994 and 1997, the average annual cost to elementary school for families increased from $12 to $22. As a result, the most economically vulnerable segments of the population were deprived of access to education. For those who were able to complete primary education, secondary education opportunities continued to decline, and the percentage of transition from primary to secondary education dropped from 49% to 40% between 1992 and 1999 [Charton 2021]. The Government's contribution under this system was mainly limited to paying teachers' salaries and maintaining school infrastructure, while parents were required to provide school uniforms, stationery, supplies, and books, as well as make financial contributions.

Shortly before the 1997 general election, amid extreme political tension and violent protests and strikes at 50 schools (including the prestigious Alliance Girls High School), a commission was appointed to review the education reform.

In 1999, President D. Moi initiated a new commission to create a *Totally Integrated Quality Education and Training* (*TIQET*). It became obvious that the 8-4-4 education system was not working as expected when it was created. The main complaints concerned access, quality, and meeting the needs of Kenyans in the labor market, many of whom remained unemployed even after completion of higher education. The Koech Commission report (1999) concluded that, like most other developing countries, Kenya faces the challenge of providing quality education to all Kenyans against a backdrop of a growing population and dwindling resources [Odebero, Ndiku 2007]. It should be noted that after the election of President Moi, he abandoned the idea of a total revision of educational policy under the pretext of the high cost of reform.

It is also worth noting that the Education Act of 1968, which was in force at that time, was outdated because it did not take into account the current state of affairs of Kenyan society in obtaining education. In 2001, the Children Act (Children Act No. 8, 2001) was adopted, which prohibited discrimination in access to education and banned child labor. However, the law did not address the issues of early childhood care, education for people with special needs, and the role of parent associations and committees. A comprehensive law on basic education, which would take into account these important needs of society, was adopted only in 2013.

Although the recommendations made by the Government's education reform commissions had led to inconsistent results, the Kenyan education system continued to expand between 1973 and 2002, with the number of students at both primary and secondary levels more than doubling (see *Figure* 1). During this period, the number of teachers in primary schools also doubled, and the number of secondary school teachers

tripled. Today, the annual graduation rate of teachers exceeds the number of available vacancies. In 2023–2024, the Kenyan Ministry of Education announced a freeze on the mass recruitment of teachers due to lack of funds [Chepkirui 2011]. By 2002, 49.3% of primary and 47.5% of secondary school students were girls, compared with 34.2% and 31.7%, respectively, in the period before independence [Mackatiani, Ariemba 2020; Fredriksen 2023].

However, gender equality has not been achieved at the university level. The share of female students increased from only 27% in 1992 to 37% in 2002. Another persistent problem was the low rate of transition from elementary to secondary school. The number of students in the 9th grade (1st grade of secondary school) was only 40% of the number of students in the 8th grade (standard 8th grade) of primary school[16].

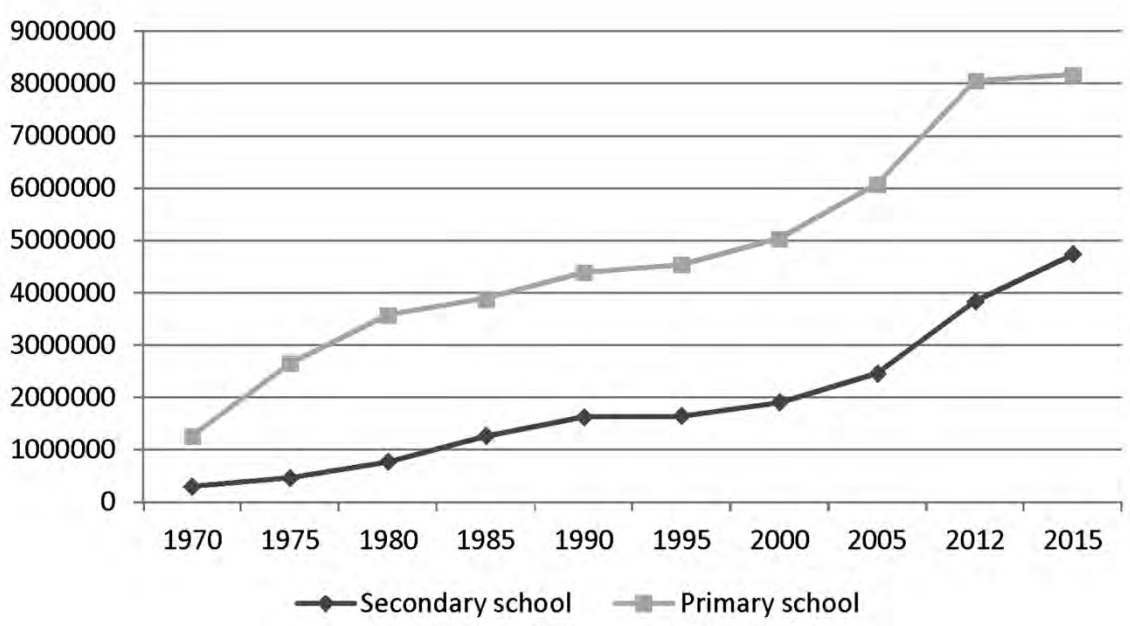

Fig. 1. **Number of primary and secondary school students in Kenya, 1970–2015.**
Source: compiled by the author based on the materials of the Basic Education Statistical Booklet 2020. Republic of Kenya Ministry of Education. https://www.education.go.ke/ (accessed: 12.02.2025)

RISING STUDENT NUMBERS AND DECREASE IN TEACHING STAFF: THE CHALLENGES OF PRESIDENT MWAI KIBAKI'S EDUCATION POLICY

In 2003, the administration of President Mwai Kibaki (2003–2013) came to power. This period became an important stage in the development of Kenya's education system. One of the reforms undertaken by the new administration was the abolition of primary school fees in 2003 (although additional fees remained, for example, for uniforms, textbooks, and meals). After that, more than a million students enrolled in primary schools[17]. Unfortunately, however, there was no proportional increase in either the number of schools or the number of teachers [Inyega et al. 2021]. According to national

[16] Continental report of the Education in Africa: Placing equity at the heart of policy. *UNESCO*. 2023. https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000384479 (accessed: 09.04.2025)
[17] Kenya Facts and Figures, 2012. Nairobi: *Kenya National Bureau of Statistics (KNBS)*. 2012. http://knbs.or.ke/downloads/pdf/Kenyafacts2012.pdf (accessed: 25.03.2025)

statistics, in 2011, the school enrollment rate in Kenya reached 95.7%. The number of students enrolled in the first grade of primary school increased by 30.6% between 2003 and 2010, which led to an increase in the total number of primary school students from 7.2 million to 9.4 million[18].

At the request of international financial organizations (the IMF and the World Bank), the government was forced to cut spending on education, which led to massive layoffs of teachers. By 2009, the number of teachers had decreased, and strikes by teaching staff began in the country under the slogans of ensuring cash payments. The shortage of teachers in the country in 2010 amounted to 66 thousand people. Between 2002 and 2009, the number of students per qualified teacher in primary schools increased from 34 to 52; in secondary schools, from 18 to 31[19].

The increase in the number of students in both primary and secondary schools raised serious concerns about the Kenyan school system's ability to maintain an acceptable level of education. To address the escalating problem, the Government began to allocate one-time grants to local communities as development funds that could be used in accordance with local needs. A significant part of these funds was spent on the improvement of Harambee's local schools.

In 2003, the Kibaki Administration began to develop a comprehensive reform—the Kenya Education Sector Support Program (KESSP). Its fundamental framework was outlined in a 2005 document by the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology (MoEST)[20]. The program was aimed at increasing access and equality, as well as improvement the quality of education in several key areas: education and training, human resource management, teacher training, information and communication technology, research and development, finance, and the legal framework [Imana 2020].

The KESSP program is a sector-wide plan for improving education with detailed goals and new governance structures based on greater decentralization of responsibility throughout the education system, along with systematic monitoring and evaluation. It also provides estimated costs, including the difference between the costs and the expected government revenues, which international donors were expected to cover. Initially, donors were enthusiastic, but concerns about corruption and mismanagement of funds led the World Bank and other donors to suspend support for KESSP in 2009.

In 2008, Kenya adopted the Kenya Vision 2030 long-term strategy, which took into account the country's national development plan and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG-4)[21] program. One of its main ambitious goals was to ensure 100% coverage of basic education and to close the gender gap (especially in the northern and coastal

[18] Economic survey, 2011. Nairobi: *Kenya National Bureau of Statistics (KNBS)*. 2011. https://www.knbs.or.ke/reports/2011-economic-survey/ (accessed: 11.04.2025)

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[21] The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are a set of 17 interrelated goals developed in 2015 by the UN General Assembly as a "blueprint for achieving a better and more sustainable future for all." SDG-4 is to ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all.

regions). In accordance with the national Competency-Based Curriculum (CBC) plan, it was planned to introduce digital learning (provide schools with tablets, computers, and access to online platforms) as well as expand the network of technical colleges by 2025 and increase the proportion of students in STEM classes (specialized groups for the study of science, technology, engineering, and mathematics).

It is also worth noting that the new Constitution, which was adopted in 2010[22], granted the right to free compulsory eight-year education, with special attention to minorities, the disabled, and other marginalized groups. Over the past decade, the rise in the duration of schooling was accompanied by a rapid increase in the number of students receiving primary education. The school enrollment rate in 2002 was 62%, which was lower than the average for low-income countries and Sub-Saharan Africa (66% and 63%, respectively). However, by 2009, the school enrollment rate in Kenya had increased to 82%, which was higher than the average for low-income countries and sub-Saharan Africa (81% and 76%, respectively) [Nikolay, Prizzon, Hine 2014].

According to national statistics, in 2011, the school enrollment rate in Kenya was 95.7%[23]. The number of first grade (first year of primary school) students increased by 30.6% between 2003 and 2010, as part of the rise in the total number of primary school students from 7.2 million to 9.4 million as a result of the Free Primary Education policy (FPE) and lower financial barriers to entry[24].

THE LIGHT AND SHADOWS OF DIGITAL LITERACY: PRESIDENT UHURU KENYATTA'S EDUCATION POLICY

Uhuru Kenyatta, the President of Kenya in 2013–2022, prioritized the primary to secondary school transition program. The president sought to ensure equal learning opportunities regardless of socio-economic status. He also spearheaded digital literacy initiatives by establishment information and communication technology (ICT) labs and centers to integrate Kenyan children in the global digital revolution, in line with the long-term Kenya Vision 2030 initiative. He declared: "Our vision and goal were to ensure that every Kenyan child had equal opportunities."[25]

Notable educational policy measures include a project to provide laptops or tablets to first-grade elementary school students across the country and the Basic Education Act (2013). The aim of the project was to promote digital literacy and prepare young students for the changing conditions of the modern world.

However, this project was very expensive. In 2013, the Kenyan government allocated about $665 million for the project, which angered various educators and school

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[25] Uhuru brags about his achievements as President of Kenya. *The Kenya Times*. 14.07.2022. https://thekenyatimes.com/latest-kenya-times-news/uhuru-brags-about-his-achievements-as-president-of-kenya/ (accessed: 25.03.2025)

associations[26]. In addition to the high cost of the project, the problem with its implementation was that few teachers and students were fully aware of how to use computers and how to work with all the functionality of new technologies. The government lacked qualified personnel to implement the program, and schools sometimes lacked classrooms and even sockets for connecting to the power grid.

The National Education Development Plan, published by the Kenyan Ministry of Education in 2014, highlighted regional disparities in the provision of education, gender inequality, and enrollment in primary and secondary education. Female literacy rates in Kenya were showing significant regional differences. For example, in large cities such as Nairobi, the female literacy rate reached about 90%. However, in poorer and more remote northern areas such as Mandera, Turkana, and Wajir, this figure was significantly lower, amounting to less than 10%[27].

It was revealed that in arid and semi-arid areas, in informal urban settlements, inequality in school funding and lack of developed infrastructure are particularly visible. The increase in the number of students in primary schools was not accompanied by a rise in the number of staff and infrastructure in some regions, which led to overcrowding in schools significantly exceeding the national average [Mackatiani, Ariemba, Ngware 2020]. In 2014, the pupil–teacher ratio in Kenyan public primary schools was 34.5:1. However, in some districts the ratio was much higher—60 and even 70 students per teacher. In public secondary schools, it was only 20.2:1[28].

The second component of the national reform was the planned shift of the educational cycle in the country from 8 years of primary school and 4 years of secondary school (cycle 8-4) to 2 years of preschool education, 6 years of primary school, 3 years of lower secondary school, and 3 years of senior secondary school, as well as 3 years of higher education (minimum), the cycle: 2-6-3-3-3.

One of the goals of this change is to provide students with more opportunities to choose a specialization at the early stages of school education and to improve training methods in the field of technical and vocational education (TVET). This concept was developed by the Ministry of Education in an attempt to provide a curriculum that allows for specialization in order to combat rising unemployment in Kenya, which rose from 8.9% in 2008 to 9.3% in 2019[29].

In 2017, Kenyan Cabinet Secretary for Education, Science and Technology Fred Matiangi launched an active campaign called *Tupeleke Watoto Shule* (“Let's take our children to school”). The aim of this initiative was to ensure a 100% transition of students from primary school to secondary school. This initiative was launched as part of a global campaign to provide all children with 12 years of basic education. Under the original 8-4-

[26] Kenya giving laptops to all first-graders amid controversy. *The Christian Science Monitor*. 18.06.2013. https://www.csmonitor.com/World/Africa/2013/0618/Kenya-giving-laptops-to-all-first-graders-amid-controversy (accessed: 25.03.2025)

[27] National education sector plan. Volume one: Basic education programme rationale and approach. Government Printer, *Ministry of Education.* 2015.

[28] Basic education statistical booklet. Nairobi: *Kenya Institute of Curriculum Development.* 2014. https://kicd.ac.ke/curriculum-reform/basic-education-statistical-booklet/ (accessed: 26.03.2025)

[29] Basic education curriculum framework. *Kenya Institute of Curriculum Development.* 2017 https://kicd.ac.ke/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/CURRICULUMFRAMEWORK.pdf (accessed: 21.03.2025)

4 system, Kenya's secondary schools were divided into four territorial groups: national, overseas, district, and regional.

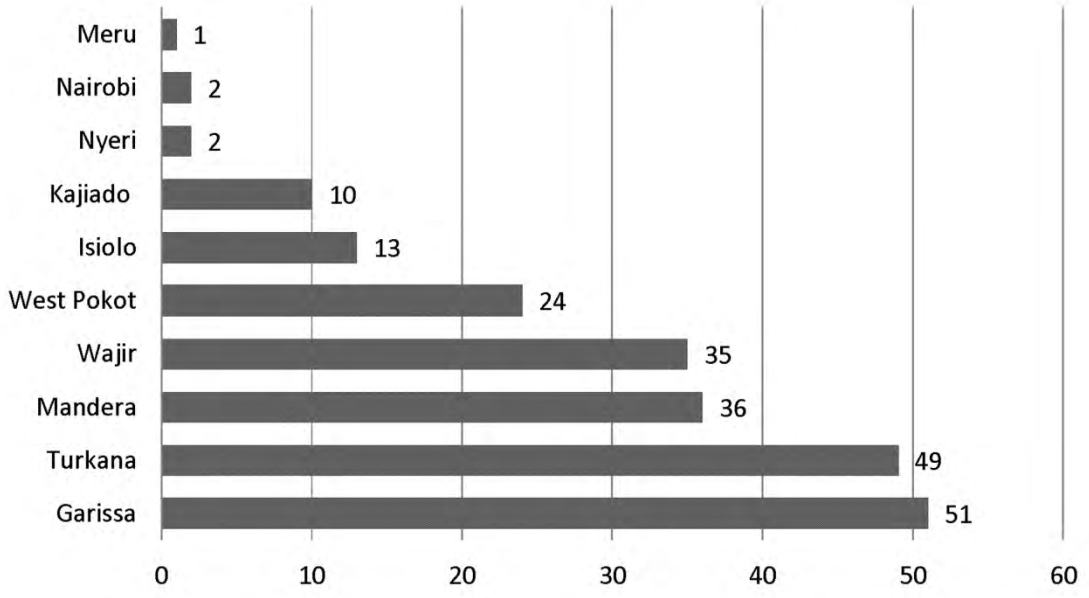

Fig. 2. **Children who do not attend an educational institution, by region in 2022 (%).**
Source: compiled by the author based on materials from the World Inequality Database on Education. Kenya. UNESCO UIS (WISE). https://education-inequalities.org/countries/kenya (accessed: 25.03.2025)

Kenya, like many other countries, faced the problem of COVID-19. To prevent the spread of the disease in educational institutions, the Kenyan Government closed all schools and higher education institutions. On-site education was temporarily replaced by distance learning. However, due to the unavailability of technology and fast and reliable Internet access, students in rural areas and from low-income families were left out of education. Prolonged school closures led to increased child labor, school dropouts, child pregnancies, and early marriage. All this was reflected in the low level of student transition from primary to secondary school, which undermined the new strategies already developed in the Kenyan education sector aimed at increasing access to education.

Kenya implemented large-scale education reforms, including the transition to the 2-6-3-3-3 system and teacher retraining. The Teachers Service Commission (TSC) and the Kenya National Examinations Council (KNEC) facilitated a phased rollout, but the process required more time than anticipated.

In 2023, the new education model was officially launched. However, school administrations faced a number of problems: the allocation and transition of lower grades to secondary school (and, consequently, the demand for teaching staff in each individual school), the list of potential career paths and specialized classes for each senior secondary school, staffing of the schools, and the search for funding. The Ministry of Education is currently facing all these challenges.

CONCLUSION

Over time, a number of curriculum reforms have been implemented in Kenya in response to the needs of the labor market, and curricula have been adjusted in accordance

with local and international legal documents. It can be argued that the Kenyan curriculum is becoming more inclusive and practice-oriented and aimed at the development of vocational skills. This commitment to development is reflected in the Kenyan Constitution of 2010, the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG-4), and the Kenya Vision 2030 program. Kenya has provided broad access to education at the primary and secondary levels. Special attention has been paid to information and communication technologies (ICT) in training programs. Major Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) programs were launched, and the proportion of students in STEM classes (specialized groups in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics) was increased in accordance with the programs of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG-4), as well as the Kenya Vision 2030.

Kenya adopted a number of important legal documents in the field of education: the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (July 30, 1990), the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (July 11, 1990), the Children Act of 2001, the provisions on education in the Constitution of 2010, and the Education Act of 2013.

Since 2002, free primary education has been introduced, and since 2008, secondary education has been free. Finally, mathematics, science, and vocational subjects have been introduced in schools, which proves that recent educational reforms are aimed at developing innovation in education in line with the program Kenya Vision 2030.

However, it was not always taken into account how these initiatives would be implemented in the future. The fundamental disadvantage of the education reform process in Kenya was the lack of proper involvement of the key stakeholders—parents, teachers, and students—in the development of educational policy. This has led to the low effectiveness of some reforms, and, in some cases, to an aggravation of problems: increased unemployment among graduates and inefficient allocation of educational resources.

Despite the efforts of various Commissions to find solutions to education problems, the country still faces serious challenges in terms of the quality, equality, and accessibility of educational services. Many of the recommendations made by the Commissions were either not implemented or partially implemented.

The education reforms in Kenya initiated in 2019–2020 largely reflect modern realities and take into account the specifics of the national education system. Initiatives over the past decade, including the Kenya Education Sector Support Program (KESSP) and the Kenya Vision 2030, have shown effectiveness in addressing these challenges. Currently, the focus is shifting from quantitative indicators towards improving the quality of education, enhanced teacher training, an increase in the number of specialized classes, and the development of infrastructure programs.

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Научная статья

РАЗВИТИЕ СИСТЕМЫ НАЧАЛЬНОГО И СРЕДНЕГО ОБЩЕГО ОБРАЗОВАНИЯ В РЕСПУБЛИКЕ КЕНИЯ (1963–2022 гг.)

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Аннотация. Статья посвящена исследованию процесса развития образования в Республике Кения с 1963 г. по 2022 г., то есть с момента обретения независимости до настоящего времени. В рассматриваемый период система образования страны претерпела значительные изменения. В работе анализируются ключевые этапы реформы образовательной политики, начиная с предпринятых первым президентом Джомо Кениаты, заканчивая работой правительства президента Ухуру Кениаты. Особое внимание уделяется основным достижениям в сфере образования, таким как увеличение доступа к базовому образованию, создание программ по улучшению качества обучения, внедрение современных технологий в учебный процесс. Рассматриваются проблемы и вызовы, с которыми сталкивается система образования, в том числе неравенство в доступе к обучению для различных слоев населения, нехватка кадровых ресурсов. Аргументы подкреплены данными статистического института ЮНЕСКО, Всемирной базы данных о неравенстве в сфере образования (*World Inequality Database on Education*, *WISE*), отчетов Министерства образования Кении, а также примерами успешных инициатив на уровне государственных и частных учреждений. Был проведен региональный обзор основных направлений политики в области образования и законодательной базы Кении, а также проанализированы существующие исследования о количестве и качестве начального образования в стране. Автор подчеркивает важность образовательных реформ для социально-экономического развития Кении. Исследование было сосредоточено на вопросах качественного образования в свете программы «Образования для всех» (ОДВ) и всеобщего начального образования (ВНО). В работе проанализированы проблемы, связанные с увеличением числа учащихся в начальных школах, и их последующее воздействие на качество образования в Кении.

Ключевые слова: Кения, образование, кенийское образование, начальное и среднее образование, школы *харамбее*

Конфликт интересов: автор заявляет об отсутствии конфликта интересов.

Благодарности. Автор выражает признательность редакционной коллегии, рецензентам, а также нескольким коллегам из Африки за полезные комментарии.

DOI: 10.31132/2412-5717-2025-71-2-58-74

Для цитирования: Рахматуллин Ш.Д. Развитие системы начального и среднего общего образования в Республике Кения (1963–2022 гг.). *Ученые записки Института Африки РАН*. 2025. Т. 11. № 2. С. 58–74. https://doi.org/10.31132/2412-5717-2025-71-2-58-74