



*Full Length Research Paper*

# **Socio-economic challenges faced by principals in the provision of quality secondary school education in Kenya: A case study of Nyando and Muhoroni Districts**

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Abstract

Principals play a crucial role in providing quality education. However, in some schools due to certain challenges, quality of education falls below expectation as evidenced in poor student academic achievement in national examinations. In Nyando and Muhoroni Districts, the quality of secondary education from the year 2006 to 2010 was below average, that is, for this period the mean grade was C- in Kenya Certificate of Secondary Education examinations except in the year 2007 when the mean grade was C. This implies that principals of secondary schools were facing certain challenge that was affecting the quality of secondary education. The challenges faced could have been cultural, social, and economic in nature. In the present time with advent of Christianity it is possible that the challenges could have been more of socio-economic than cultural in nature. The purpose of the study was therefore to investigate the socio-economic challenges that principals were facing in their endeavours to provide quality secondary education in Nyando and Muhoroni Districts. The study established that social challenges faced by the principals were: HIV and AIDS pandemic which was rated 4.59 by principals, large poor families which they rated as 4.21, parental low education 3.97, pregnancy 3.73 and religious practices 3.72. The study also revealed that economic challenges that principals face were: high cost of living which was rated at 4.75 by principals, poverty 4.56, school levy default 4.56, child labour 3.59 and *bodaboda* (motorbike transport) business 3.53. The study concluded that the main social challenges faced by principals were HIV and AIDS pandemic; large poor families, low parental level of education and pregnancy. The main economic challenges were high cost of living, poverty, and school levy default. The study recommended establishment of mobile clinics to mitigate effects of HIV and AIDS pandemic on the quality of education to enhance their participation in the provision of quality education and increasing free secondary education subsidy to cushion effects of poverty on quality education. The findings of this study are useful to education managers in enhancing provision of quality secondary education in Kenya.

**Keywords:** Socio-Economic Challenges, Principals, Quality, Education, Nyando and Muhoroni Districts.

## **INTRODUCTION**

Principals play crucial role in the provision of quality education whose main indicator is quality grades in public national examinations in many countries. According to Tarus (2009) the principals' leadership style has direct bearing on the function of a school as a whole thus contributes overwhelmingly to students' academic

achievement. However, due to certain challenges quality sometimes fall below expectation. Psacharopoulos and Woodhall (1985) maintained that in United States social and economic variables explain contrasting regional and racial educational standards better than school factors. They further observed the same scenario presents itself

in developing countries where social and economic factors are major challenges in providing quality education than school variables. In Kenya several studies have been done to establish variables that influence various aspects of education (Juma, Simatwa and Ayodo, 2012; Olendo, 2008; Musungu, 2007; Kipkoech, 2004; Sika, 2003). Social challenges facing provision of education are many and varied. For example HIV and AIDS scourge and related conditions, family size, distance covered by students to school from home and many others may impact negatively on quality of education (Desforges and Abouchaar, 2003). Provision of education also involves working together of many economic factors. These factors include, among other things, availability of appropriate teaching and learning resources, maintained professional development of teachers, number of contact hours with students and good learning surroundings (Mualuko, 2007). Provision of quality education through the interplay of these factors may face various economic challenges. Mualuko established that poverty and other economic challenges hinder provision of education because they lead to inadequacy of factors whose availability assure provision of quality education. Quality of education may be judged by examining various aspects. One such aspect is expected outcomes (Kanishka and Sharma, 2006). In Kenya expected outcome of secondary education is measured by Kenya Certificate of Secondary Education examination. In Nyando and Muhoroni Districts, quality of secondary education has been below average. The academic achievements for the years 2006 - 2010 for the two districts have been consistently at grade C minus (-) except 2007 when it was grade C plain as seen in Table 1.

Note: Data were from schools that existed in the same locality before the districts were separated and excluded schools from Nyakach Districts

In other words, on the average only 31% of students who took national examinations during the period under study got quality grades while majority that is 69% received low grades meaning that the quality of education was low. This is the justification for studying the social and economic challenges and coping strategies for principals in the provision of quality education in Nyando and Muhoroni Districts.

### Research Questions

- i. What are the social challenges in the Provision of Quality Education in Nyando and Muhoroni Districts?
- ii. What are the economic challenges in the Provision of Quality Education in Nyando and Muhoroni Districts?

### Conceptual Framework

Social and economic challenges in the provision of

quality education by principals are conceptualized in Figure 1.

The framework demonstrates the interplay of various variables in the secondary education subsector in the provision of quality education. The independent variable in the framework is the crucial to the role principals play in providing quality education. The dependent variable is quality of education which depends on independent variables which are social and economic challenges. Social challenges may include HIV and AIDS pandemic whereby education stakeholders may be infected or affected thus affecting provision of quality education. Size of households and education level of their heads, distance between school and home; religious and cultural practices may influence the provision of quality education by principals in various ways. Economic challenges such as households' economic status, school levies inform of lunch, development, school, and text books funds may keep students in or away from school thus affecting the provision of quality education by principal sat the long run. The intervening variables moderate the impact of independent variables on the dependent variables.

### RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study used descriptive survey design. The study population consisted of 35 principals, 117 Heads of departments, 2008 form three and four students, 2 District Quality Assurance and Standard Officers, 35 Parents Teachers Association chairpersons. Saturated sampling technique was used to select 32 principals, 32 Parents Teachers Association chairpersons and 2 District Quality Assurance and Standard Officers. Simple random sampling technique was used to select 82 Heads of Departments and 631 form three and four students. Questionnaires, interview schedules and focus group discussion were used to collect data. Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics in form of percentages, frequencies and means. Qualitative data were analyzed on an ongoing process as themes and subthemes emerged from the data.

### RESULTS

The return rate of Questionnaires was 32(100%) and 82(100%) from principals and Heads of Departments respectively.

### Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

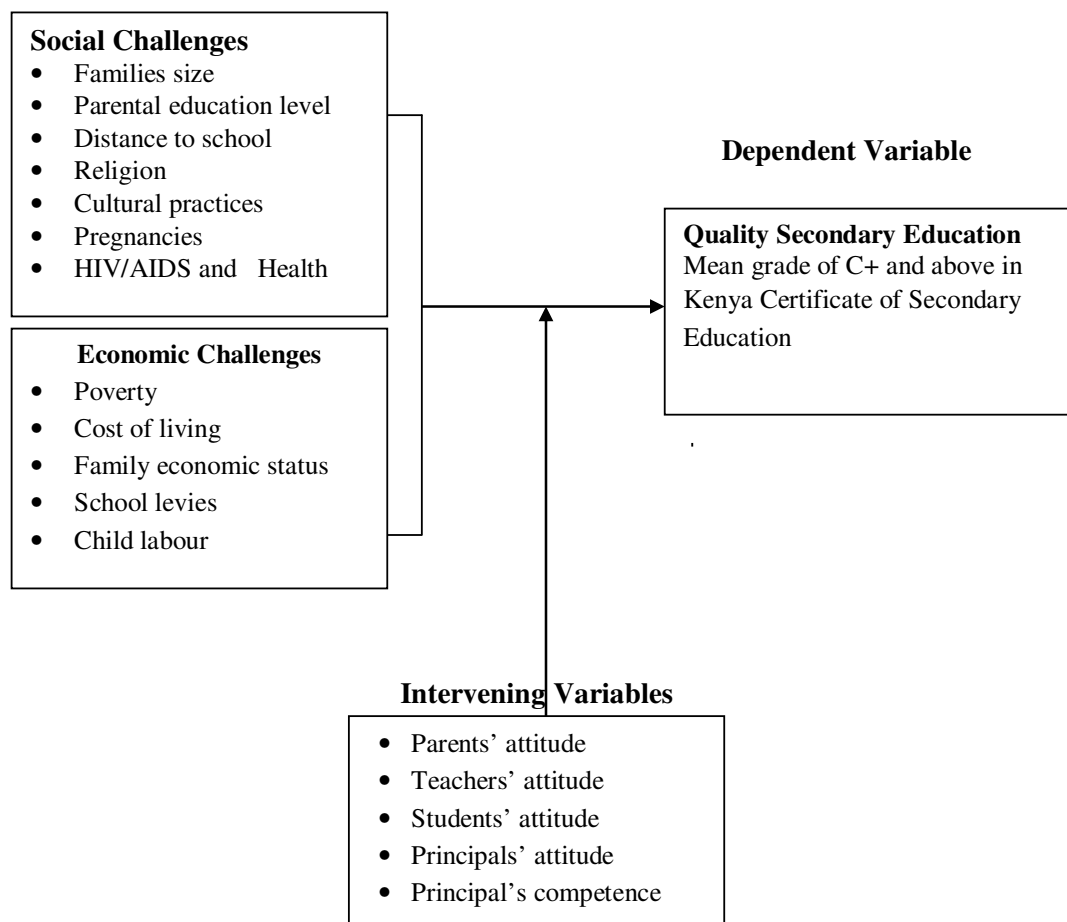
This section presents the demographic characteristics of

**Table 1.** Nyando and Muhoroni Districts combined Kenya Certificate of Secondary Education mean scores and mean grades for the years 2006 - 2010

Year	Mean Score	Mean Grade
2006	5.348	C-
2007	5.513	C
2008	4.995	C-
2009	4.682	C-
2010	4.900	C-

Source: Provincial Director of Education Office, Nyanza Province (2010)

### Independent Variables



**Figure 1.** Conceptual Framework showing Social and Economic Challenges Principals face in the provision of quality secondary education

principals and heads of departments. The characteristics studied were gender, age, professional qualification and years of experience in current station. These demographic characteristics form a basis for understanding of the social and economic challenges principals face in the provision of quality education. The demographic characteristics of principals were as shown in Figures 2, 3 and 4.

Figure 2 shows gender distribution of principals. From the findings 26 (81.25%) principals were male and

6 (18.75%) were female. This means that the study included views of both male and female principals and was therefore not gender biased.

Figure 3 shows principals headship experience in current stations. The figure shows that 14 (43.75%) principals had between 6 and 10 years of experience in their institutions, 12 (37.5%) had less than 5 years of experience while 6 (18.75%) had over 10 years of headship experience in current schools. These results show that respondents had been in the schools long

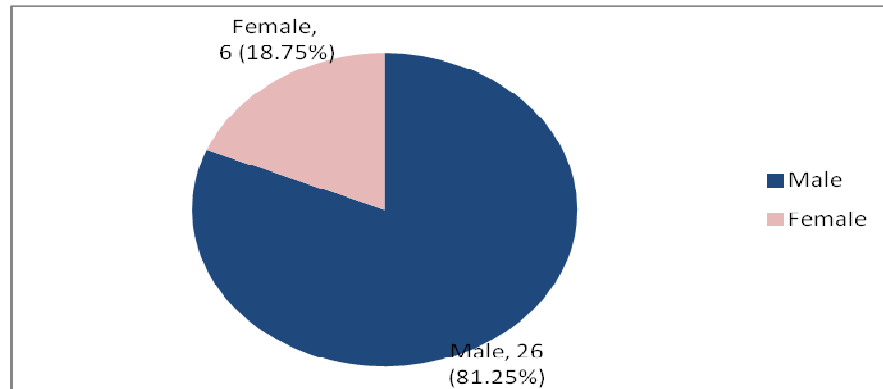


Figure 2. Gender Distribution of Head teachers (n = 32)

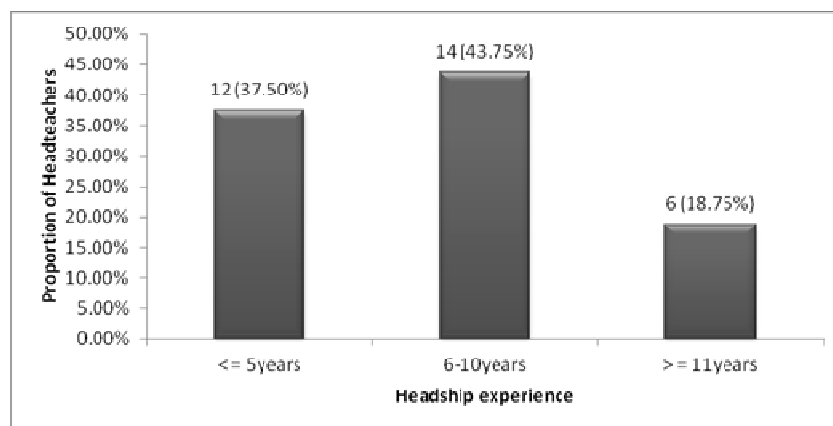


Figure 3. Headship Experience of Principals in current Stations (n = 32)

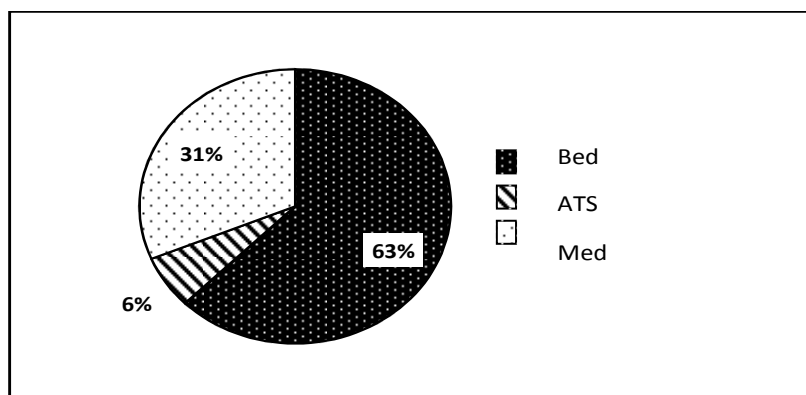


Figure 4. Professional Qualifications of Principals (n= 32)

enough to provide reliable responses on social and economic challenges experienced by principals in secondary schools in their endeavours to provide quality education.

Figure 4 shows the Professional Qualifications of Principals. The figure shows that 20(63%) Principals had Bachelor of education degree, 10(31%) had Master of education degree and 2(6%) had Approved Teacher

Status, having earned headship proficiency certificates. The results show that the respondents were qualified for their work and were therefore able to identify social and economic challenges Principals face in the provision of quality education in Nyando and Muhoroni Districts.

The demographic characteristics of Heads of Departments were established as shown in Figures 5,6 and 7.

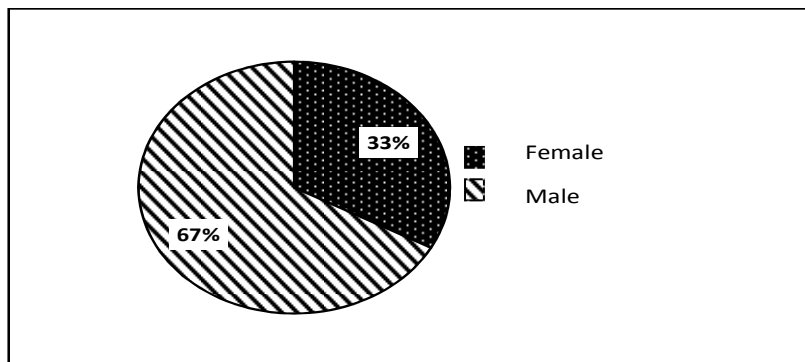


Figure 5. Gender Distribution of Heads of Departments (n = 82)

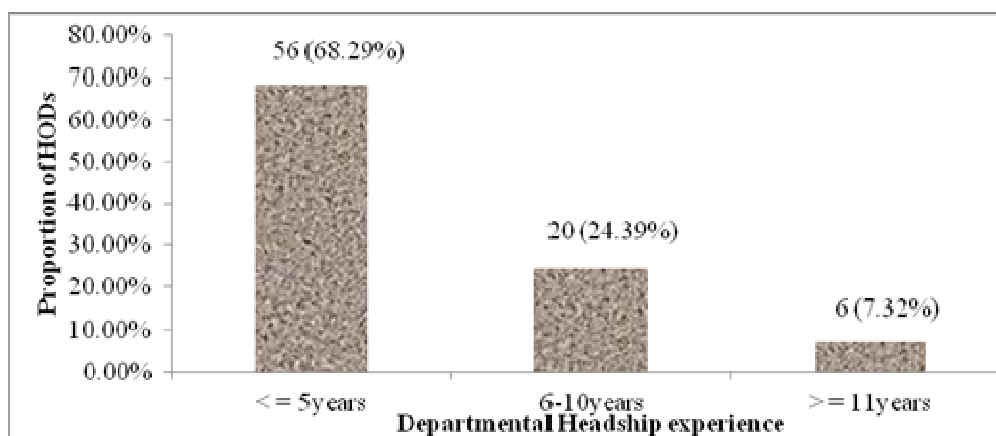


Figure 6. Years of Experience of the Heads of Departments (n = 82)

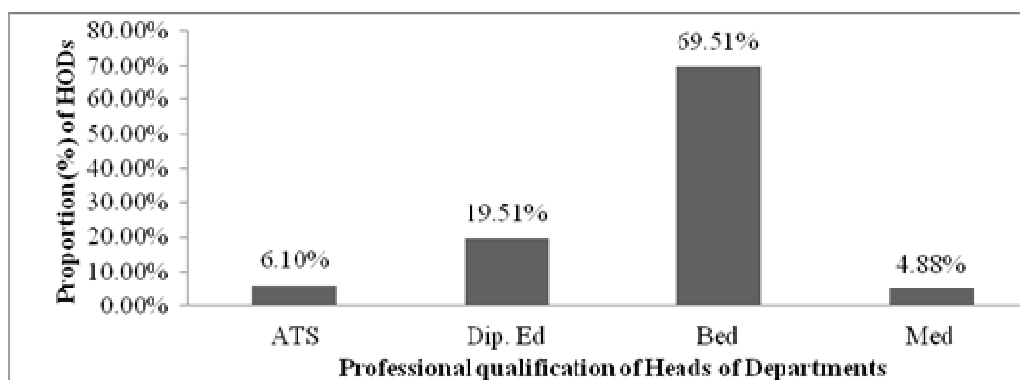


Figure 7. Professional qualifications of Heads of Departments (n = 82)

Figure 5 shows that 55(67.07%) of heads of departments were male while 27(2.93%) were female. These means that results the study included views of both male and female heads of departments and was, therefore, not gender biased.

Figure 6 shows that 56 (68.29%) Heads of Departments had less than 6 years of experience in departmental headship, 20 (24.39%) had between 6 and 10 years of experience in departmental leadership and 6

(7.32%) had over 10 years of experience in heading the departments. These results show that respondents had been in the schools long enough to provide reliable responses on social and economic principals face in their endeavours to provide quality education.

Figure 7 shows that 57(69.51%) heads of departments had Bachelors of education degree, 16 (19.51%) had diploma in education certificates, 5 (6.1%) had Approved Teachers Status having earned headship

**Table 2.** Social Challenges faced by Principals (n=32) and Heads of Department (n=82)

Social challenges	Mean Rating	
	Principals	Heads of Department
HIV and AIDS and Poor Health of parents interrupts students' learning	4.59	4.05
Large families don't provide children with necessities for home study like space, lighting et cetera	4.21	3.72
Parents with low education do not monitor their children's learning	3.97	3.70
Long distance between school and home make students reach school when too tired to concentrate on academics	3.84	3.70
Students' pregnancy affects their concentration in academics	3.73	3.63
Religious an practices destructs students' attention	3.72	4.16

**Classification of Social challenges**

4.1 - 5.0 Biggest challenge,

3.1- 4.0 Big challenge,

2.1 - 3.0 Less challenge

1.1 - 2.0 Least challenge

proficiency certificate and 4 (4.88%) had Masters of education degrees. This means that the respondents were qualified for their work and were therefore, able to identify social and economic challenges principals face in the provision of quality education in Nyando and Muhoroni Districts.

**Research Question 1**

What social challenges do Principals of Secondary Schools face in providing Quality Education in Nyando and Muhoroni Districts?

The responses to this research question were as shown in Table 2.

Table 2 shows the mean ratings for the responses of the principals and heads of departments on HIV and AIDS and poor health of parents as a social challenge for principals in providing quality education were 4.59 and 4.05 respectively. This shows that HIV and AIDS; and poor health of parents were biggest challenges faced by principals in their attempt to provide quality education in Nyando and Muhoroni Districts. The table shows that the mean ratings for the responses of the head teachers and heads of departments on large families as a challenge facing principals in providing quality education were 4.21 and 3.72 respectively. These mean ratings are above 3.00 meaning that large families that do not provide children with adequate necessities for home studies like space, lighting, and the like indeed hampered the head teachers' efforts in providing quality education in Nyando and Muhoroni Districts. Mean ratings for the responses of the head teachers and heads of departments on low level of parental education as a social challenge for principals in providing quality education were 3.97 and 3.7 respectively. The mean ratings meant that according to this study low parental level of education posed a big

challenge to the head teachers in providing quality education in Nyando and Muhoroni Districts. Long distance between school and home as a social challenge facing principals in their duty to provide quality education had mean ratings of 3.84 and 3.7 for the responses of the principals and heads of departments respectively. This means that according to this study long distance between school and home actually was a challenge to head teachers in providing quality education in Nyando and Muhoroni districts. Mean ratings for the responses of the principals and heads of departments on students' pregnancy as a challenge for principals in providing quality education were 3.73 and 3.63 respectively. The mean ratings were all greater than 3.00 this means that students' pregnancy was indeed a challenge for principals in providing quality education in Nyando and Muhoroni Districts. Religious and cultural practices as a social challenge facing principals in their effort to provide quality education had mean ratings of 3.72 and 4.16 for the responses of the principals and heads of departments respectively. This confirms that religious and cultural practices indeed hindered head teachers from offering quality education in Nyando and Muhoroni Districts.

This study further explored the equality in mean responses between the principals and the heads of departments on social challenges faced by principals of secondary schools in providing quality education. To establish this, t – test for comparison of means was done at a set alpha level of 0.05 as shown in Table 3.

Table 3 shows that the calculated t – value is greater than the critical value hence the conclusion here is that the two mean responses were significantly different at the set significance level of 0.05.

**Research Question 2**

The research question responded to was: What

**Table 3.** t – Test on mean responses from Principals and Heads of Departments

			Levene's Test For Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means		
			F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2tailed)
Social challenges	Equal variances assumed		2.73	.101	4.27	112	.692
	Equal variances not assumed				3.78	54.25	.70

**Table 4.** Economic Challenges faced by Principals in the provision of quality secondary education as indicated by Principals (n=32) and Heads of departments (n=82).

Economic Challenges	Mean Ratings	
	Principals	Heads of Departments
High cost of living prevents parents from providing extra learning resources to their children	4.75	4.57
Poverty (Lack of basic necessities-food, shelter, and clothing) reduces students' concentration in class.	4.56	4.00
Non payment of school levies (lunch money, bus fund, development fees, extra tuition) keep students away from school for long	4.56	3.83
Low economic status of a family prevents students from concentrating in academic work	4.03	3.90
There are cases of students missing lessons to work in sugar cane/rice plantations	3.59	4.04
There are cases of students missing lessons to conduct <i>bodaboda</i> business	3.53	3.49

**Classification of Economic challenges**

4.1 - 5.0 Biggest challenge,

3.1- 4.0 Big challenge,

2.1 - 3.0 Less challenge

1.1 - 2.0 Least challenge

economic challenges do Principals of Secondary Schools face in providing Quality Education in Nyando and Muhoroni Districts?

The responses to this research question were as shown in Table 4.

Table 4 shows that mean ratings for responses of head teachers and heads of departments on high cost of living as a challenge facing principals in their effort to provide quality education were 4.75 and 4.57 respectively. The mean ratings show that high cost of living was the biggest challenge facing principals in providing quality education in Nyando and Muhoroni Districts. The mean ratings for responses of head teachers and heads of departments on non payment of school levies were 4.56 and 3.82 respectively. The mean ratings imply that non payment of school levies indeed upset the efforts of head teachers in providing quality education in Nyando and Muhoroni Districts. Mean ratings for the responses of the head teachers and heads of departments on low economic status of households were 4.03 and 3.90 respectively. This confirms that low economic status of households actually hampered the efforts of the head teachers in providing quality education in Nyando and Muhoroni Districts. The responses of the head teachers and heads of departments on child labour as a challenge faced by principals in their effort to provide

quality education had mean ratings of 3.59 and 4.04 respectively. This means that child labour was a challenge for head teachers in providing quality education in Nyando and Muhoroni Districts. The mean ratings for the responses of the head teachers and heads of departments on *bodaboda* business as a challenge facing principals in providing quality education were 3.53 and 3.49 respectively. This shows that *bodaboda* business was a challenge for head teachers in providing quality education in Nyando and Muhoroni Districts. The study further explored the equality in the mean responses between the head teachers and the heads of departments on the economic challenges faced by principals of secondary schools in providing quality education. To establish this, t-test for comparison of means was done at an alpha level of 0.05. The results were as shown in Table 5.

Table 5 shows that the calculated t-value is less than the critical value hence the conclusion here is that the two mean responses were not significantly different at set significance level of 0.05.

**DISCUSSION**

HIV and AIDS; and related factors interrupted students' learning as they missed lessons to nurse sick relatives.

**Table 5.** t – Test comparing the Mean responses of Principals and Head of Departments

		Levene's Test For Equality of Variances					t-test for Equality of Means		
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig.(2 tailed)			
<b>Economic Challenges</b>	Equal variances assumed	.006	.938	1.03	111	.306			
	Equal variances not assumed			1.063	61.090	.292			

On the other hand, parents' sickness as well hindered them from involvement in economic activities to pay for their children's education or monitor their academic performance. During interviews one District Quality and Assurance Standards Officer maintained that HIV and AIDS; and poor health of parents were major challenges when he remarked: "Infected parents were too weak to engage in meaningful income generating adventures to get money to pay fees for their children in secondary schools. Students of such parents could then be sent home frequently." This made the affected students to miss many lessons leading to poor syllabus coverage and therefore inadequate preparation for examinations resulting into below average performance. One of the principals, John Mark (pseudonym) also cited HIV and AIDS; and related factors as a challenge facing principals in their effort to provide quality education when he commended: "Establishment of mobile health clinics be launched to enable AIDS patients in education sector to readily access health and guidance/counselling services. With HIV and AIDS when one is not infected then one is affected for instant, infected parents were too stressed with their conditions to think about their children's performance in school while the children of such parents were also very stressed with their parents' conditions to concentrate on their academic work." In such situations provision of quality education was hindered because the student lost hope in life since they knew their parents were dying and nobody would pay their school fees nor show educational concern for them. The students could not therefore concentrate on their academic work. It also emerged during focus group discussions that HIV and AIDS posed a challenge for principals as one student recounted: "Infected students normally had poor health which made them go home frequently for medications." Since HIV infection reduces immune system of the body, infected students, therefore, frequently suffer from opportunistic diseases such as Tuberculosis that require medication. This made the students to lose learning time; in addition, attending lessons in such conditions could not help much because they were too stressed to concentrate in academic pursuits consequently lowering their academic performance. This finding is consistent with Guarcello et al's (2004) study, which established that HIV and AIDS pandemic severely reduced the

achievements of the goals of Education for All and the United Nations Millennium Development Goals by affecting the quality of education, in that the number of stakeholders in the education system who were affected by the scourge increased many folds. Many households with orphans could not pay school fees and their children were therefore sent home frequently. Students were missing school to nurse sick parents, care for young siblings or work to increase family income. The students were traumatized due to deaths of relatives and loss of parental support hence could not concentrate in studies. Many teachers were irregular in their duties because of illness related to HIV and AIDS. Furthermore, when they reported for work they were too weak to withstand the rigors of lessons and could leave school early affecting the syllabus coverage. Students required, on individual basis, favourable environment for studies at home consisting of well furnished room with comfortable furniture, good source of reading light, noise free surrounding among other things.

Households with large poor families of ten and above children were found incapacitated in the provision of the requirements for all their children which made them not to concentrate on their studies leading to low performance in examinations. During interview with District Quality and Assurance Standards Officers, one of them also mentioned large poor families as a challenge in the provision of quality education when he observed: "The districts' poverty index of 62% was reflected in the inability of large poor families to provide adequate extra learning materials for all their children. Most of these families had the attitude that Constituency Development Fund and Free Secondary Education funds were enough to educate children in secondary schools."

Since at secondary level levies paid in schools were done per child and not per family it was a big burden for a poor household with five or more children to educate many children up to secondary level. Students from such families stayed away from school for long because of non-payment of levies making them miss many lessons leading to low performance in examinations. One Parents Teachers Association chairperson Onyango Opere (pseudonym) also concurred that large poor families were a challenge to provision of quality education when he stated: "In such families even enough food could not be



provided for the whole family leave alone educating many children beyond secondary school.” This was because the little income got was used to feed the family. Since schools could not provide all learning materials like books, mathematical calculators, mathematical sets and the like, students from large poor families suffered most because their parents could not provide them with these things either. The students therefore could not get materials to complete assignments nor do extra work at home. This affected their academic performance. During focus group discussions, one student also admitted that large poor families were a challenge to principals in their effort to provide quality education by accepting that; there was poor communication between parents and their children. Due to this unfortunate situation parents could not monitor learning of their children nor encourage them to put more effort on their academic work. Students from such backgrounds suffered poor upbringing, had low discipline hence antagonized school administration. This made principals to spend much time on maintaining discipline instead of concentrating on curriculum supervision thus syllabus coverage could not be ascertained leading to low academic performance. This finding corroborates Caceres’ (2004), study which maintained that school achievement was higher for students from small families where parents were able to adequately invest their resources in a manner that would improve the students’ chances of success in education. Small well to do families are able to send their children to high cost public or private schools; allocate adequate resources to the children and spend valuable time with them without feeling any strain.

This study established that parents with low education did not understand the importance of secondary education, they therefore could neither monitor nor encourage their children to concentrate on their academic work so that high performance in examinations could be achieved. During interviews, one of the Parents Teachers Association chairpersons, Gilbert Oremo (pseudonym) also cited low parental education as a challenge for principals in providing quality education when he stated: “Most farmers with higher education take their children to schools outside the districts, because they have the fear that their children would mix with children of their labourers thus lowering their dignity.” This gave way for children whose parents had low level of education to get admission in most secondary schools in the districts. Consequently these parents found their way into school committees where they hardly contributed positively because of inability to understand requirements that could lead to high academic achievement in secondary schools. For instance they could argue with the principals when money is wanted for the purpose of improving quality of education.

During interview with the District Quality and Assurance Standards Officers, one was in accord that

low parental level of education was a challenge to provision of quality education by observing: “Adult education program in the district requires revamping to enable illiterate and semi illiterate parents acquire some education which can make them understand benefits of education because a parent who has education knows the value of educating a child to secondary level. But an illiterate parent will be contented when a child has reached class 8 only.” This affected quality of education such that parents with low education could neither be role models to their children nor give meaningful advice to the children on how they could improve their academic performance. This finding is consistent with Garikai’s, (2010) study which established that children whose parents have superior education are high achievers at school because they normally emulate their parents; striving to reach or even surpass where the parents reached with education.

Long distance between home and school made students to reach school when too tired to concentrate on class work; likewise they reached home after school too tired to complete assignments or do extra studies. During interviews with the principals, one Kilion Otange (pseudonym) justified long distance as a challenge to provision of quality education when he observed: “Students who come from far arrived late when lessons already started and teachers had to wait for the late comers to get quorum to start a lesson.” This led to the learners missing parts of the lessons which were not repeated. Since teachers had to wait for more students to arrive before lessons started, learning times were wasted resulting into poor syllabus coverage causing poor performance in examinations. During interviews, one of the Parents Teachers Association chairpersons Justus Rono (pseudonym) also mentioned long distance as a challenge to provision of quality education when he remarked: “Students who travelled very long distance to school are exposed to meeting and interacting with different people some with questionable characters along the way.” Meeting different people on the way introduced students to bad habits such as truancy and drug abuse. Students lost focus in academic work leading to poor school achievement. During focus group discussion, one student also cited long distance to school as a challenge to principals in their effort to provide quality education when he testified: “My home is very far from school and I have to wake up very early to get to school in time, I therefore do not have enough sleep I normally fall asleep during lessons.” This scenario was the same for many students whose homes were situated far from school they reached school when they were too tired, hungry and fatigued. Sometimes late comers are punished during class time making students to miss some lessons taught in the day. The same applied when students arrived home from school. They could not settle down to do assignment or extra academic work as a result of exhaustion. These resulted into under performance in the

examinations. Another student also mentioned long distance a challenge to provision of quality education by stating that; “during rainy seasons the students whose homes are very far from school arrive home with their books wet from rain.” The students lost their notes and had nothing to use to prepare for examinations this resulted into low performance in examinations. The finding of this study is consistent with Garikai’s, (2010) study which discovered that the distance a student covers to reach school corresponds to the student’s academic performance such that when the distance increases the student’s performance declines.

High mean ratings for the responses of the principals and heads of departments on students’ pregnancy as a challenge for principals in providing quality education was due to the fact that student pregnancy led to drop out of both the girl and the boy responsible, who when readmitted according to Ministry of education policy learnt under stress and stigmatization thus could not concentrate on their academic work. During focus group discussions, it emerged that students’ pregnancy was a challenge to the principals in providing quality education as one student observed: “Teachers, other students, and even parents see the readmitted students as having low morals and bad examples.” This made the readmitted students feel unwanted, fail to concentrate in class therefore led to low performance in examinations. Another student mentioned it as a challenge when she observed: “The readmitted students have divided attention, one thinking about her children at home and the other focusing on her academics.” Readmitted student would think about how to get funds to meet the cost of bringing up the child since the burden is left for her alone to bear. The focus on academic work by such students therefore diminished and led to low school achievement. One more student cited student pregnancy as a hindrance to provision of quality education by revealing that; “some teachers especially madams use ill words such as ‘student-mothers’ to refer to the readmitted students which they found to be derogatory.” This led to the students feeling isolated, lost hope, and eventually declined in academic performance. This finding, however, disagreed with Sifuniso’s, (2004) study, which established that: “Majority of the readmitted girls become better students by gaining maturity because they come back with the sole purpose to study and pass their examinations (p.11). However, these students study under stress due to endured twine burden of bringing up children as well as studying. They suffer insults and derogatory remarks from teachers and schoolboys and even parents’ demoralizing remarks such as family letdowns and bad examples to other children. During the interview, one of the principals, John Magak (pseudonym), demonstrated that religion and culture posed big challenge for principals in providing quality education when he observed that: “Parents with strong religious affiliation choose for their children schools to be

admitted and subjects to study, for instance Christian Religious Education or Islamic Religious Education, the students then stay in the schools and do these subjects to please the parents but not because they like.” This situation was a challenge to provision of quality education because the students lacked interest in the schools and the subjects imposed on them by their parents. They therefore did not concentrate in their studies leading to low performance in the examinations. Although this finding is inconsistent with Cohen-Zada and Sander’s, (2007) study which established that academic performance is superior in religious schools, it is in agreement with the study in the aspect that parents prefer the religious schools for their children’s learning with the belief that the schools would inculcate religious attitudes into the children. This study also found out that cultural practices presented challenge to principals in providing quality education when one of the Parents Teachers Association chairpersons, Johnston Onyancha, (pseudonym) observed: “Learners miss school to take part in preparation of cultural events such as funerals for their relatives.” Students stayed very late into the night to participate in the preparations of the funerals. They dug graves, slaughtered animals to be fed to mourners and in some instances sent to call relatives in far off places. These errands made the students to miss many lessons and led to incomplete coverage of the syllabus. This resulted in low achievement in the examinations.

Another Parents Teachers Association chairperson, Samson Owino (pseudonym) cited cultural beliefs as a challenge to provision of quality when he remarked: “Most parents are still strongly connected to traditions and do not understand the importance of secondary education, they do not encourage their children to work hard in school saying that the children would be bewitched by villagers who think that the family has made a stride.”

This therefore made the students to relax and did not concentrate in class work leading to poor academic performance. During focused group discussions a student also cited culture as a challenge to provision of quality education when she observed: “In our community mentioning of some parts of the body is a taboo such that when they are mentioned during a lesson like Biology the students feel embarrassed or become excited.” This resulted into lose of concentration in the lessons by the students eventually leading to low academic performance. The finding of this study is consistent with Sue O’Shaughnessy’s, (2009) study which found out that provision of quality education requires understanding of the indigenous culture, its values, beliefs, customs and ways of life which collectively network to bring quality in learning. In other words, successful implementation of the curriculum requires that students’ cultural background is understood. Another student mentioned that culture was a challenge for principals by saying: “In our culture women are still not recognized and when women

teachers teach they are not given respect.” This made the female teachers to feel intimidated while in for lessons and they could not give their best to students. The students did not take the lessons taught by female teachers seriously and failed to consult them leading to low performance in examinations. One more student also attested that culture is a hindrance to provision of quality education when she remarked: “The belief that girls were not to be educated and should be married off to bring wealth to the family still abounds in our community.” This distracted attention of many girls from school work denying them concentration in their studies leading to poor performance in examinations. This finding is consistent with UNICEF’s (2008) report that: “Culturally, girls are perceived as family ‘assets’ and a source of wealth they are socialized and moulded to view themselves in this light. Once a girl reaches puberty, she is considered ready for marriage to serve her purpose.” (p.33). Girls who have reached secondary level are affected most because majority are in their teenage years and are viewed as ripe to realize the societal goal of bringing wealth to the family they get discouraged and are de-motivated to pursue education. Mean responses of the principals and that of the heads of departments were different and the difference was statistically significant which shows that there was no uniformity in the responses of principals and their heads of departments on the social challenges faced by principals in their quest to provide quality education. The discrepancy in the responses is attributed to differences in knowledge and experience of the respondents. Notwithstanding this discrepancy the views of principals’ may count more.

High cost of living prevented parents from providing extra learning resources to their children because any little income in the possession of a house hold was used to acquire basics of life such as food and clothing. Students without extra learning requirements could not do any extra work once from school leading to poor performance in examinations. During interviews one of the principals, David Osoo (pseudonym) mentioned high cost of living as a barrier to provision of quality education by saying: “It leads to schools increasing the amount of levies paid so that they could afford their requirements.” Since parents and guardians would not get funds from their already overstretched resources they were unable to pay the levies promptly. Students from such households overstayed at home when they were sent away from school to get the money making them miss many lessons which eventually are reflected in low academic performance. Another principal, Eliakim Bala (pseudonym) also admitted that high cost of living was a challenge by observing that: “Costs of teaching and learning resources such as chemicals and books and foodstuff for feeding program escalated consequently students could not be provided with all requirements for

their educational and welfare needs.” This ultimately caused concern and stress to principals.

Inadequate provision of requirements to students caused stress in them leading to disruption of learning programs. This resulted into poor performance in examinations. During interviews with Parents Teachers Association chairpersons, one of them, Wilkister Oloo (pseudonym) cited high cost of living as a challenge to provision of quality education by remarking: “It reduces the amount of parents’ disposable income as a result of which they opt to spend only on basic needs such as food and clothing.” Parents therefore could neither pay school levies nor buy extra learning materials for their children. This promoted poor study habits where students could only rely on teachers’ work and not do extra work at home because they lacked resources to use while out of school hence performing poorly in examinations. During focus group discussions a student also mentioned high cost of living as a hindrance to provision of quality education by remarking: “When there is shortage of food supply as a result of high cost of living and with this shortage of food supply, ratio *ilikuwa kidogo* (became little) and concentration *pia ilikuja chini* (also reduced).” Most students at secondary level of education were in their critical stage of development when they needed adequate nutritional provisions; however any short supply of the same resulted into reduced concentration in studies which caused low examination performance that caused stress to principals.

The study reveals that the mean ratings for the responses of head teachers and heads of departments on poverty as a challenge faced by principals in their attempt to provide quality education were 4.56 and 4.00 respectively. The mean ratings indicate that poverty actually hampered the head teachers’ efforts in providing quality education in Nyando and Muhoroni Districts. Poverty, which showed itself in form of lack of basic necessities such as food, shelter and clothing, resulted in many students going to school without eating any meal, wearing tattered uniforms and after spending a night in houses which were in deplorable states thus missing sleep. Most students from such backgrounds did not concentrate on their studies while in school because most of their time they took to think about the sorry state of affairs back at home. Such students lacked self esteem leading to lack of concentration and low examination performance. In the course of interviews, one principal, James Ouma (pseudonym) mentioned poverty as a hindrance to provision of quality education by observing: “Due to poverty many parents provide only one meal per day for their families and students from such families value food offered by the school.” This made the students to come to school when hungry and malnourished and did not settle for morning lessons because they unconsciously waited for lunch break so that they could eat food provided in the school. This

denied them time to concentrate in academic work leading to low performance in examinations. Another principal, Florence Otieno (pseudonym), concurred that poverty was a challenge to provision of quality education by stating: "Due to poverty most parents bought for their children *mtumba* (second hand clothes) with colours resembling school colours." However, students without correct school uniforms were frequently sent home to get their uniforms making them miss many lessons this resulted into under performance in examinations because of poor syllabus coverage. During interviews one of the Parents Teachers Association chairpersons, Jane Onyango (pseudonym), was in accord that poverty is a challenge faced by principals in providing quality education when she observed: "due to poverty most parents do not provide their daughters with sanitary pads." This made many girls to miss school when menstruating leading to loss of learning time and inadequate syllabus coverage resulting into under performance in examinations. During interviews with District Quality and Assurance Standards Officers, it also emerged that poverty was a major challenge for principals in providing quality education when one of them remarked: "Schools within the districts have many of their parents living below poverty line and children of those parents are frequently sent home for fees where they take too long to report back. The idea of Free Secondary Education was ideal however the government should consider increasing the subsidy from the current amount to Kshs. 15,000 per student per year to cushion them more from the effects of poverty."

This made the students to waste valuable study time leading to incomplete syllabus coverage and eventually resulted into poor examination results. During focused group discussions, a student pointed out that poverty is a major challenge for principals in providing quality education by remarking: "Many students are not given pocket money because of poverty and are unable to buy foodstuff such as bread and fruits to supplement what the school provides." This frustrated and stressed many students leading to lose of concentration and eventually resulting into low performance in examination. This finding is in agreement with Mualuko's (2007) study which established that: "Poverty leads to lack of right instructional facilities and equipment, poor curriculum delivery, unfavourable and unattractive learning environments resulting into students who cannot compete in the job market" (p.164). Because of poverty no meaningful teaching and learning process takes place hence education provided in such deprived environment is far from being of quality.

Non-payment of school levies such as lunch money, bus fund, development fees, remedial fees and many others made students to be sent away from school where they stayed for long missing many lessons. This made the students to do examinations without completing the syllabus leading to poor performance in the

examinations. Non payment of remedial fees also prevented principals from arranging for remedial lessons leading to most students not understanding concepts learned resulting into poor performance in examinations. During interviews, one of the Parents Teachers Association chairpersons, Jane Onyango (pseudonym), also mentioned non-payment of school levies a challenge for principals in providing quality education by observing: "Accumulated school levies due to non-payment led to many students dropping out of school hence discouraging the head teacher from asking them to pay." This resulted into lack of funds in schools to purchase items for lunch programme, organize remedial lessons for slow learners, or complete development projects meant to promote learning. Principals therefore could not arrange for lunch for students nor organized remedial lessons for them resulting into low concentration in academic work leading to low performance in examinations. This finding is consistent with Dieltiens and Meny-Gibert's (2008) study which established that school authorities use varied met Heads of Departments to have the fees paid and these include "illegal and punitive steps such as withholding learners' results, depriving learners of access to school facilities, and humiliating learners and parents publicly"(p. 4). As a result of these criticisms or humiliation inflicted on the students and their parents by educators and principals because of non-payment of fees some students stayed away from school leading to incomplete coverage of syllabus and eventually to low performance in examinations. Most households with low economic status were unable to pay school levies, buy extra learning materials and provide basic necessities for their children; the children were stressed and did not concentrate in studies leading to low performance in examination. During focus group discussions a student also mentioned low economic status of households as a challenge for principals in providing quality education by saying: "Since students from households with low economic statuses were unable to do home study at night due to lack of proper reading light; the government should supply all day schools with electricity so that such students can extend their studies in to the night to enable them complete assignments in time and even do extra studies before retiring home."

Most students from homes with low economic status could not cope with academic work because of lack of learning requirements such as pens, mathematical sets and mathematical tables. Inadequate basic furniture for studies like chairs and tables; and even lighting at home to do assignments led to poor examination performance. This finding concurs with Juma et al., (2012) study which established that: "Students from rich households are adequately catered for and hence have higher concentration on learning than students from poor households who lack basic items and this adversely affects their participation in education" (p.307). This is

because students from rich homes are always in school to concentrate in their studies they also receive a lot of support from their parents who are able to spend to ensure that the students perform highly in examinations this contrary to what is observed in households with low economic status.

Child labour in the districts made students to miss lessons to get money by working in sugar cane and rice plantations this also make them spend study time to think about where and how to use the money. Since the children did this at the expense of attending schools or doing assignments they did not concentrate in academics resulting in low performance in examinations. During interviews, one of the Parents Teachers Association chairpersons Rosemary Awaka (pseudonym) also cited child labour as a challenge for principals in providing quality education by observing that: "Most parents instruct their children to harvest or weed sugarcane during weekends and school holidays so as to raise their households' income or get money to meet school requirements such as levies, uniform and learning materials."

Most of the students from such households continued to think about money even during school days, others use the money in leisure places like video shows and drugs thus distracted their attention from concentrating in studies leading to low performance in examinations. During focused group discussions, a student also mentioned child labour as a challenge facing principals in providing quality education when he divulged "Students engage in child labour even in the school compound. We fetch water for masons who are constructing classes during class time." Although principals may do this as a way of saving school funds it made students to miss lessons or even attend lessons while too tired to concentrate in academic work leading to low performance in examinations. The finding of this study is consistent with Bezerra et al., (2009) study which established that students who engage in child labour have their academic achievement below expectation because such students tire themselves physically, and have less time and energy to devote to their studies than students who do not engage in work. During interview, one Parents Teachers Association chairperson Dedan Okore (pseudonym) observed that: "Many *bodaboda* operators in this area are youths who dropped out of school and that is the reason they are causing many accidents and the government should control the business so that only adults are allowed to continue with the trade." Involvement of teachers in the industry also severely affected their professional performance because they were not readily available for students for consultation resulting into low performance in the examinations. The finding of this study is consistent with Ochieng and Egesa's, (2003) study which established that majority of *bodaboda* operators are primary school drop outs and that there are associations to enforce operational discipline such as

ensuring that only persons who are above school going age are engaged in the business so that students who should be focused in their studies are not attracted to it. Mean responses of the principals and that of the heads of departments were different and the differences were statistically significant. This confirmed that there was no uniformity in the responses of principals and their heads of departments on the economic challenges faced by principals in their mission to provide quality education. The inconsistency in the responses is attributed to differences in knowledge and experience.

## CONCLUSION

The biggest Social challenges faced by principals in the provision of quality education were HIV and AIDS; and related conditions, large families and low parental level of education. They adversely affected students' learning leading to poor syllabus coverage and lowering concentration on academic work. The major Economic challenges faced by principals in the provision of quality education were high cost of living, poverty, non payment of school levies and low economic status of families. They frustrated the efforts of principals in their duty to provide quality education. In a nutshell, it can be noted that the core function of a school is to provide quality education and it is the responsibility of the principal to ensure that this function is fulfilled. Hence failure to deliver quality grades in national examinations is a big challenge as it negatively impacts on the principals' competence and relevance to the entire education system. It is therefore important that principals should be aware of the challenges they face and strategize on coping with these challenges for purposes of provision of quality education.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

With regard to social challenges faced by Principals the study recommended that:

- i. Mobile health clinics should be established by the government to enable AIDS patients readily access health guidance and counseling services to mitigate the effects of HIV and AIDS on quality education for students in secondary schools.
- ii. Adult education programmes should be revamped by the government for illiterate or semi literate parents to attend to raise their education standards so that they can participate in programmes intended to enhance the provision of quality education in schools.

With regard to Economic challenges faced by Principals the study recommended that:

- i. The government should consider increasing the free secondary education subsidy from Ksh 10,200 per student per year to Ksh 15,000 to cushion students from

the effects of poverty on provision of quality education.

- ii. The government should supply electricity to all public day secondary schools to enable students from households with low economic status extend their extra studies into the night within the schools to enhance provision of quality education, when it is absolutely viable..
- iii. The government should engage the local administration in monitoring and ensuring that individuals involved in *bodaboda* (motorbike transport) business are above 18 years of age to keep away children from the business so that they focus on studies for better outcome.

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