

Factors Influencing the Implementation of Free Secondary Education in Mumias District, Kenya

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Abstract

This study sought to find out the factors that influence the implementation of free secondary education (FSE) in Kenya. Implementation refers to a situation where the programme is made to work and meets its major objectives of increasing enrolment and retention in secondary schools. The background of this study traces the efforts to provide free secondary education. The provision of free secondary education is very important in Kenya given that the country is a low income one. Also given the limited studies on the programme currently, this study sought to reduce that gap. The purpose of this study was to find out factors influencing the implementation of free secondary education in Kenya. The study had five objectives derived from the said purpose. The objectives include finding the influence of the management capacity of principals and B.O.Gs, time when the funds are received, parental support and socio-economic factors on the implementation of free secondary education in Kenya. The study was carried out in Mumias district of Western province. The study is based on the theory of constraints as the researcher examines the factors constraining the achievement of FSE objectives. It is hoped the results of the study will be useful to many stakeholders and help in the streamlining of free secondary education.

The researcher experienced problems such as limited finances and time for carrying out the study more thoroughly. Literature review was done on the implementation of free secondary education around the world. The study used the survey design and data collection was by use of the questionnaire method. The questionnaire was validated through piloting. Schools were put into clusters from which a sample was collected using simple random sampling. Data from the field was analyzed using fundamental statistical measures such as location and dispersion. The findings of the study show that the management capacity of the principals, time of funds disbursement to schools and parental support have a negative influence on the implementation of FSE. The B.O.Gs have a positive influence while socio-economic factors have both negative and positive influence.. Some of the conclusions are that the government needs to speed up sending of money to the schools and probably increase the funding. The study recommends among others that the principals be subjected to compulsory training in management and that the ministry should increase the frequency of school inspection.

Key Words: Free Secondary Education, Free Secondary School Funds, Management Capacity and Enrolment

Introduction

Investment in human resource development enables individuals to contribute more positively and effectively to the development of the country. According to UNESCO (2000), illiteracy has been identified as a factor that imposes both relative and absolute burden on the economic well being of the nation. This is the reason why many countries including Britain, USA, Sweden, Egypt and Canada, among others, started long ago in the 1950s to finance secondary education. This could partly be responsible for the advancement in these nations. African countries such as Nigeria, Uganda and Kenya are trying to wake up to this reality

In the year 2000, all the 191 United Nations (U.N) states adopted the Millennium Declaration, GA Resolution A/54/2000, which aimed at creating a global corporative approach to meeting challenges facing future world development (UNESCO, 2002). The millennium meeting created a framework of goals, targets and indicators, famously known as the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). One of the key MDG is universal education or Education for All (EFA). Following the EFA goal, the Dakar Framework for Action World Education forum was held in Dakar (Senegal) from 26th-28th April 2000. EFA was seen as a basic right, national and international priority requiring a strong and sustained political commitment, enhanced financial allocations and the participation of all EFA partners in the process of policy design, planning and implementation (UNESCO, 2002). All participating countries, Kenya included, committed themselves to the achievement of this goal and meeting set targets.

Kenya, following the popular sweeping of the NARC party to power at the end of the year 2002, EFA became one of their flagship objectives - probably to sustain popularity.

The ruling party declared its intent to design a system which guarantees all citizens the right to quality education and a competitive edge in the global job market (NARC Manifesto). At the start of term one 2003, Free Primary Education (FPE) was started. Hastily done, as it were, it had a host of hiccups. To streamline things, the government of Kenya (GOK) developed Sessional Paper No. 1 of 2005: A Policy Framework on Education Training and Research for the 21st Century.

To further bolster the gains achieved so far, the government of Kenya developed the Kenya Education Sector Support Program (KESSP). This was a five year plan (2005 -2010) which would make the sessional paper operational using a Sector Wide Approach to Planning (SWAP). KESSP has 23 sectors (investment programmes) including Early Childhood Development and Education (ECDE) Primary School materials and Secondary Education among others. KESSP funding is by GoK, Development partners, private sector and civil society communities (Ngaca, 2009). Thus selected secondary schools started to receive funds from the government for infrastructure development under KESSP.

Buoyed by the popularity and success, albeit with teething problems, of the FPE supported by KESSP, political parties chose Free Secondary Education (FSE) as their most enticing campaign platform in the run up to the 2007 General Elections (GE). The three mainstream parties; Orange Democratic Party (ODM), Party of National Unity (PNU) and Orange Democratic Party of Kenya (ODM-K) included FSE in their manifestos. The three parties formed the major partners in the Coalition government formed at the start of 2008 and Free Secondary Education was born. In a circular released on ninth January 2008 by the Ministry of Education (MoE) and signed by the Permanent Secretary (PS), the guidelines on FSE implementation were spelt out to Provincial Directors of Education (PDEs),

District Education Officers (DEOs) and Head teachers(principals) of Public Secondary Schools, albeit on interim basis. Key among these included how the Kshs. 10,265 per student was to be distributed against the various covered vote heads (see appendix).

Others included opening of special accounts specifically for these funds and how parents were to meet the remainder of the needs, mostly uniforms and feeding the students in school. With the ground laid, the first tranche of the funds were released into the new accounts mid-way term one of the year 2008.

Following the launch of Free Primary Education (FPE) in 2003 and now FSE in 2008, Kenya joined the few countries in sub Saharan Africa giving 12 years universal basic education in line with the International protocols signed in 1990 at Jomtein, Thailand and in 2000 at Dakar Senegal.

With all the fore going, it is obvious that state provision of both FPE and FSE is not only desirable and the right thing to do but also one demanded by the International Community. The gains from a populace with at least this basic learning far out do all the sacrifice and investment put in it. Like it is with any change management, it would be fool hardy not to expect hiccups in the implementation of this noble project of FSE. Mr. Cleophas Tirop,Chairman of the Kenya Secondary school heads Association (KESSHA), obviously speaking on the behalf of the principals, reiterated their support for the programme but was quick to urge the GoK to solve the many challenges facing them in the implementation process(Oyaro,2008).

This study therefore aimed at establishing these factors and their influence / impact on the effective implementation of free secondary education in Kenya.

Statement of the Problem

According to Mutahi (2008) and Oyaro (2008), among the challenges facing free secondary education are increased enrolment against shrinking numbers of teachers due to a free on teacher employment by the government in 1998, shortage of classrooms, high poverty levels among the parents (limiting their ability to meet their side of obligations such as school uniforms and meals for the students while in school), general apathy to education due to high levels of unemployment for graduates and limited capacity and preparation of the principals.

In a paper presented during a KESI course for Deputy principals at Tom Mboya labour college, Kisumu (10th -23rd August, 2008), Aboka, the then Nyanza Deputy Provincial Director of Education, identified thirteen challenges facing FSE implementation. These included, among others, late disbursement of funds, the struggle to divorce the FSE from politics, confusion on who should benefit from FSE funding, poor information provision by institutions and inadequate capacities by implementing personnel. In view of the foregoing, the study was designed to find out, from the principals, those factors influencing the achievement of the FSE goals. The study sought to find out the factors influencing the implementation of Free Secondary Education in Kenya. As the implementing officers, the principals deal with these challenges on a daily basis in the course of their work as school managers.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study was to find out the factors influencing the implementation of Free secondary education in Kenya using the case of Mumias district in Western province.

Objectives of the Study

The objectives of this study were;

- To establish whether the principals' management capacity influences the implementation of free secondary education programme.
- To determine whether the time taken by the government to provide the funds influences the implementation of free secondary education.
- To examine whether the schools' Board of Governors has an influence on the implementation of free secondary education.
- To investigate whether socio economic factors have an influence on the implementation of free secondary education.
- To determine whether parental support for the free secondary education influences the implementation of the programme.

Significance of the Study

It is hoped that the results of the study will be useful to many stakeholders in education including the government, parents and the students. The government will be able to speed up the release of the funds to schools and also see the need to increase the vote heads covered by FSE. This will enable both enrolment and retention to increase. This is very important given the high poverty levels in the country, with the worst case scenario being Kuria constituency where 80% of the people live below the poverty line (CBS, 2005). Early disbursement will also enable the principals to plan and procure facilities in time for schools opening and in line with the Government Financial Management Act 2004 and the Public Procurement Act 2005. The results will be useful to parents and students. The parents will learn the importance of meeting their obligations in the school, knowing that free secondary education does not cover all that the school requires to give their children quality education.

This will be useful to the learners as they will stay longer in school without being send home for the levies. They will also benefit from facilities pit up by the funds paid by the parents.

Free Secondary Education around the World

The realization that illiteracy seriously hampers both economic and industrial growth of nations has led many of them into putting a lot of investment in the provision of free education. This illiteracy imposes both relative and absolute burden on the economic well being of the nation (UNESCO, 2000). Whereas some countries realized this earlier and set off to invest in education, more countries are slowly realizing the relevance of this.

The United Kingdom Experience

As long ago as 1950 Hertfordshire in the United Kingdom introduced a "Cheque book scheme" giving heads of schools their own general account with responsibility for stationery, materials, textbooks, library books, repairs of furniture and equipment, purchase of small apparatus, cleaning materials and first aid materials. In this scheme, unspent balances could be carried forward. This scheme was very successful and was copied by London in 1970s and quickly followed by many other regions of the United Kingdom (Downes; 1988)

It later emerged that higher institutions of education were sizeable and quite complex organization and that they required a strong professional financial support services for successful management (Warner and Palfreyman, 1996). In view of this, criteria for assessing local management of the schools were established. These included; Efficiency in the use of resources, Improvement in the quality of teaching and learning, and responsiveness to clients.

Head teachers were also trained in:- Management and cost accounting - to be able to understand costing and allocation of resources and activities; Financial accounting to understand management control and accountability and Budget monitoring (Levacic;1995).In the period 1989-1996, the British schools were bombarded by a succession of initiatives, reforms and regulations. Those managing and leading schools have all the time benefited from useful help from the Times Educational Supplement (TES) (Archimedes; 1996).

There are vital lessons to be gained from this experience including the fact that the principals and their management capacity are very key to the successful implementation of the programme. Therefore training of principals and continuous checking on their management is very important. This means that those who run secondary schools even today will require some form of assistance in managing the intricate procedures in free secondary education anywhere else in the world, Kenya included. Similarly, we see that secondary schools are complex institutions to manage in their own right making it necessary to continue upgrading the skills of principals.

The U.S.A. Experience

In the USA, education is mainly provided by the public sector with funding from three levels namely; federal government, state and local government. Because of the disparities in the economies of states and local authorities, funding of education varies regionally. This is more given that of the total input in education, 46% is supposed to be provided by the local government budgets. Even within the same state, local authorities vary in their investment in education.

For example, the state of New Jersey has the highest investment per child and yet in this state, one district spends 8,000 dollars (highest) while another spends 4,000 dollars (lowest) (wikipedia). Child education in the USA is however compulsory. It is clear therefore that to achieve some parity, especially in developing countries such as Kenya, funds should be equally distributed from a central pool. However, just like in the USA, regions and schools in Kenya are at different levels of development making equal distribution of funds per se unfair to some schools. To achieve high levels of enrolment, Kenya can learn from the USA and make secondary education compulsory. This will avoid a situation where enrolment remains low in spite of the funding by the government.

The Canadian Experience

Education in Canada is a government run programme of public education which is provided, funded and overseen by the federal, provincial and local governments. Education is also compulsory up to 16 or 18 years depending on the province. It is the provincial government which runs education (Wikipedia). Again one good lesson here is to make secondary education compulsory in Kenya to increase enrolment and therefore literacy levels in the country.

The Swedish Experience

In Sweden, all children who join secondary school learn for free. All in all, a child is allocated funding for education from pre-school to secondary school (Willis, 2009). Whereas this type of funding is the most desirable for countries such as Kenya, it may most likely happen in countries such as Sweden which are highly developed. Kenya can learn to increase funding as the economy grows.

The Egyptian Experience

Since the 1950s, the Egyptian government has taken up the responsibility of supervising and financing education to achieve the principles of justice, equality and equal opportunity. Though the government had ambitions to finance all aspects of education, the finances became unattainable and this adversely affected the implementation having embraced the concept of free education for all in which the state was solely responsible for financing education. The Egyptian Ministry of Education released a document in 1952 directing that those spending on private education in the primary stage should not benefit from free education during secondary education (Zahir, 2006). This was probably to try and reduce the expenditure on free secondary education.

This means that financing of education, especially for developing countries like Kenya, is costly and governments must prepare well. Another lesson is that these finances must be managed effectively to achieve the set goals.

The Nigerian Experience

Secondary education in Nigeria is divided into cycles-junior, 3 years and senior, 3 years. Junior education is free but senior secondary students are required to purchase textbooks and uniforms costing them an average of 200 US dollars (ksh 16,000) (wikipedia). In Nigeria, the federal government has two secondary schools in each of the 36 states. These schools are funded by the federal government while the rest of the public schools are run and funded by the state governments.

The Nigerian funding is similar to Kenya where some cost has been left to the parent. Where parents may not be able to meet these costs, it may mean no secondary education for their children in spite of the government funds.

Uganda's Experience

The first country in sub-Sahara Africa to start Universal Secondary Education (U.S.E) was Uganda, Kenya's neighbour, in February 2007. The USE or FSE was aimed at doubling the number of those joining secondary school or continuing with learning. According to the Acting Ugandan Education Commissioner in the year 2007, the programme was envisaged to help rural communities to produce people who actively participate in economic activities. They saw that to grow, a country must invest in education. The programme was an immediate success story as enrolment in secondary schools skyrocketed from 150,000 to 380,000 taking up 90% of all primary school graduands, that is, 90% transition. Some of the limitations of the programme were that head teachers' input was not sought in planning and the head teachers were not trained sufficiently in knowledge and skills on implementation (Oyaro, 2008). It is clear that in developing nations such as Uganda and Kenya, free schooling is a big relief to many people and therefore such a programme registers immediate success. However, poor planning and limited enhancement of the principal's capacity to manage the programmes negatively influences the achievements of the desired goals. This incapacity limited the possible level of success of the programme.

Free Secondary Education In Kenya

In the year 2008, the government of Kenya launched Vision 2030. This was a blue print for the developments of the country aimed at transforming Kenya into a newly industrializing middle income country by the year 2030. To realize this Vision, several anchor areas with several flagship projects were identified. One such anchor was Human resource Development and the Ministry of education was given the responsibility to strive to make Kenyans literate.

The ministry was to reduce illiteracy by increasing access to education and improving the transition rate from primary school to secondary school. In partnership with the private sector, Kenya was to increase funding to support the schools in increasing their enrolment and retaining learners (vision 2030). According to Sarah Cameron, Chief Communications officer of UNICEF's Nairobi office, few countries have made a breakthrough into middle income status without the majority of their citizens having access to secondary education (Oyaro, 2008).

In launching Free secondary Education in Kenya, the Ministry of Education appreciated the fact that fees' paying was responsible for the low transition rate from primary to secondary schools. With this recognition, the GoK made a commitment through sessional paper number one of 2005 to increase transition to 70% by providing free basic education (Sessional Paper No. 1 of 2005 and MOE Circular NO. MOE/G1/9/1/44). The first step in implementation of the policy was a stakeholders' forum which led to the formation of the National Taskforce on Affordable Secondary Education. Their key mandate was to examine the costs of secondary education as indicated in form one joining instructions and thereafter identify modalities for the implementation of FSE. The guidelines on FSE issued by the Ministry were based on the recommendations of this taskforce (MOE/G1/9/1/44)

Allocation of funds to public secondary schools was based on the formula of budgeting, that is, allocated based on the number of learners in the school at the rate of Kshs 10,265 per learner. This is one of the formulas used in local school financial management in the United Kingdom government funding of education (Downes; 1988). This gross numbers method advantages the schools which are already well established as they get more funds and develop faster (Economies of scale).

To give a hypothetical example: if each child is allocated ksh.100 for laboratory equipment, in a single stream school with an average of forty learners per class, it translates to ksh.16, 000 only. In a school of six streams it comes to ksh.96, 000, giving a range of ksh.80, 000. Given that the six stream school is likely to have most of the basic facilities such as laboratories, microscopes etc, they are likely to advance more than the one stream school. This system perpetuates the prevalent inequalities between schools. Soon after the launch of free secondary education in term one of 2008, head teachers meeting in Mombasa during their Annual General Meeting, praised the programme and promised to fully support and implement it. They noted that enrolment had already increased by 300,000 learners in the first term of FSE. From the onset they noted that delay in the release of funds and failure to fund all activities by the GoK would pose challenges to the efficient implementation (Jibril, 2008).

According to the Ministry of Education (MOE), one of the most immediate challenges was classrooms to accommodate the extra learners attracted by FSE. Professor Karega Mutahi, the then Permanent Secretary in the ministry of Education said that the Country needed 250 new schools or 4,000 new classrooms in existing ones to cater for this increase (Oyaro,2008). As a stop gap measure, the MOE raised the class capacity from 40 to 45 learners and pegged funding for schools on this threshold. Another challenge would definitely be teacher student ratio, already stretched by freezing of teacher employment way back in 1998.

According to Knight (1993), there are three key concepts in effective financial management of schools. They include economy or the careful use of resources, efficiency or the fullest possible attainment of set goals, objectives or standards and lastly effectiveness or the cost incurred versus what it attains.

These are called the three Es. He goes on to say that money coming into schools from sources such as the government is treated as 'their money and spent with a light heart free from the tedious concerns' (Knight, 1993, p.21). This attitude definitely limits the attainment of set goals as it means principals are likely to use FSE funds in Kenya with such 'a light heart'. A research carried by Kilonzo (2007) found out that 92.5% of the parents felt that they should not contribute anything to the free primary education in Kenya since it was 'free'. Since the same are parents in secondary schools, the chances of full and committed parental support to free secondary education cannot be guaranteed.

B.O.Gs are the custodians of school funds and property (Education Act, 1968). They are mandated to audit and regulate expenditure by the school principals to ensure income received is applied for the intended purpose to achieve desired goals. According to Wanderi, this presumes that BOGs and principals are knowledgeable in matters such as law, human resource management, supplies and procurement, contracting, accounting and project management (wikipedia).

A casual survey of the quality, caliber and appointment procedure of both B.O.Gs and Principals reveals alarming limitations in meeting the standards above. Most of them are usually politically motivated appointments with scant reference to credentials. The politics vary from the village to the clan, constituency and tribe. Usually the clarion call is that 'we want one of our own' or a councilor or Member of Parliament rewards a confidant with an appointment. The MOE officials will usually be bullied into sanctioning such appointments. Kilonzo (2007) quotes Olanko who says that most of the head teachers are picked from the classroom and therefore face an uphill task in management.

In his research Kilonzo found out that 97% and 100% of primary headteachers (FPE) said that they needed training on management in general and financial management in particular respectively. The same situation obtains in secondary schools pointing to incapacity in management of the FSE funds. In her research, Chepkonga (2006) found out that 80.9% of the principals said that they needed training in accountancy procedures,

63.8% in auditing, 57% in management and 93% in preparing budgets. In his research, Cheruiyot (2006) found out that only 50% of the principals served as deputy principals before appointment as principals. Even so, they did not gain the requisite knowledge and experience. In the her study, Chepkonga (2006) found out that 72% had no interview before appointment and 72% had no induction course before starting to serve as principals. This will definitely negatively impact on the efficient and effective implementation of FSE. Cheruiyot (2006) recommends that attendance of education management conferences, workshops and seminars be made compulsory and closely monitored by the ministry of education's inspectorate division.

According to Kuria and Onyango (2006), B.O.Gs are not giving necessary leadership that would promote Total Quality Management (TQM) practices necessary for schools continuous improvement. According to Wangatho (2007), most of the BOG members have inadequate education, training and commitment to manage schools properly. Implementation of FSE is also likely to be affected by disharmony between the B.O.Gs and the principals. According to Kilemi and Osita (1999), principals of schools can overrule decisions by the BOGs and vice versa. This will definitely end up in a haphazard and unsystematic implementation of any projects or utilization of the school funds sent by the FSE programme for that matter.

In some cases, principals of schools dominate BOGs if BOGs are lacking in capacity and vice versa. This in the final analysis creates a disconnect in this implementing arm of the school.

As already noted, most potential and actual secondary school learners were kept home by lack of school fees. A casual look at what a learner needs to stay in school reveals that Ksh 10,265.00 is inadequate. According to the daily Nation newspaper editorial on 12th February 2008, determining that extra costs charged to parents are manageable and within certain guidelines is definitely one more challenge. Therefore chances that a child paid for by the GoK subsidy could for example fail to raise funds for their lunch in school and stay home are real. A survey done by Undugu Society of Kenya in March 2010, shows that more than half a million children are out of school simply because they cannot afford school uniform. According to this survey, a full set of uniform costs ksh 2000 and 6000 for primary and secondary schools respectively.

Secondary school requiring a blazer will see the student incur another ksh2500 to 3000 (Otieno, 2010). The uniform requirement is basically a British colonial relic as many countries do without it. Most schools will insist on the uniform being purchased from particular shops giving parents no room for other options especially on pricing. Such outlets will usually be run by persons allied to the school managers. Although the ministry's stated position is that no child should be sent away from school for lack of uniform, this has never been implemented. Looking at various fees structures, on average, low cost schools charge roughly ksh 10,000 annually for day scholars excluding uniform (see sample fees structure in the appendices). This will definitely keep many learners at home as most parents may not afford these fees hampering the effective achievement of FSE goals of increasing transition and retention rates

According to Kilonzo (2007), 94% of primary school head teachers who implement the FPE programme found the cash to be inadequate and coupled with delayed disbursement hampering the effective implementation of the programme. According to a research done by Musalia, even the areas funded by the government have inadequate funds. She cites the example of Quality Assurance, whose funds were found to be very minimal in meeting set requirements (Musalia, 2005). This happens yet there are no guidelines on how to bridge the gap or deficit in under funded areas by the government leaving the head teachers in a dilemma.

FSE implementation in Kenya was on the "spur of the moment", that is, without proper research and planning. According to Chesswaso (1969), planning involves obtaining and analyzing statistics and using them to make projections of future development and in particular, estimates of human, physical and financial resources needed to achieve proposed development. This view gains more ground given that a report in the Daily Nation newspaper on 12th February 2008 says that in Kenya the Inspectorate Department has always had insufficient evaluation capacity. With poor planning and inept follow up on expenditure and projects by the Inspectorate, chances of efficient implementation of FSE are limited. According to Barasa (2007), ministry of education auditors may not be available to conduct auditing exercises regularly or appointed auditors have been often corrupted to conceal the truth in cases of funds misappropriation. Also audited reports are rarely acted upon by higher authorities even in cases of very clear misuse of funds. This means that budgeted facilities and materials may not be acquired limiting the effectiveness of FSE.

According to Ngaca (2009) Kenya was praised for making good progress towards education by the introduction of FPE and FSE.

This was during the United Nations “High level Event” on MDGs held in Washington in the USA in September 2008. Ngaca goes on to say that Capacity challenges are being addressed through demand driven training programmes for education managers at all levels. This training is co-coordinated by the Kenya Education Staff Institute (KESI) and so far 16,000 managers had already undergone training. This is a clear admission that those to implement both FPE and FSE were lacking in management knowledge and thus limiting the attainment of set goals. So although Kenya was praised for introducing FPE and FSE, its success in achieving set goals could have been limited this factor of management incapacity. In his research, Wanyonyi (2004) found out that usually, many of these planned trainings fail to take off. Ministry of education officials conceded that only 50% of planned workshops actually took place in the year. That means therefore that chances of eliminating management incapacity are very limited.

Factors Influencing the Implementation of Free Secondary Education

Management capacity of Principals and Boards of Governors

The minister of education has the mandate to manage schools under the Education Act (CAP 211) and the Teachers service Commission Act (CAP 212). The minister delegates mandate at the school level to the boards and principals. The successful implementation of any programme in the school therefore depends on their managerial capacity. However, this capacity may be inadequate in them. Chepkonga (2006) found out that the principals needed training in very key management areas such as accountancy (80.9%), preparing budgets (93%) and general management (57%).

While Kilonzo (2007) found out that 100% of the primary head teachers needed training in management.

On their part, Kuria and Onyango (2006) say that the boards are not giving the necessary leadership that would promote quality management in schools. This was echoed by Wangatho (2007) in his study.

Parental Support

The Government funding left out some key areas that make learning to go smoothly in the schools. Such areas include infrastructure development (classrooms, libraries and laboratories among others), provision of meals to the students while they are in school and buying school uniforms. However, the feeling that the government provides free education has led to unwillingness by many parents to make any payments to the schools. According to Kilonzo (2007), 92.5% of the parents were not ready to pay levies to schools since education was ‘free’. Since they the same parents with children in secondary schools, the same thinking is likely to prevail.

Socio- Economic Factors

Even with good and timely funding, enrolment and retention may be limited by socio-economic factors in the environment. In his study, Wanyonyi (2004) found out that school drop outs were still there despite the introduction of free primary education. According to that study, some of the factors causing school drop outs include early marriages, pregnancies, domestic duties, negligence by parents (discipline) and peer pressure (lack of interest in school).

Time when the FSE Funds are received in School

As soon as students report to school for the start of the term, learning begins. This means that the materials for learning and teaching to be acquired by free secondary education funds must be in school already. If the government delays in making the funds available, learning is definitely affected both in the short and long term.

According to a study done by Musalia (2005) and that done by Kilonzo (2007), persistent delays by the government in sending the money to schools was hampering the effective implementation of free secondary education.

Materials and Methods

Research Design

The research design used in this study was survey. A Survey is an attempt to collect data from members of a population in order to determine the current status of the population in respect to one or more variables. Survey was therefore an appropriate design for this study as it enabled the researcher to obtain information that describes the current situation in FSE implementation by asking the respondents questions. It's a kind of self report (Mugenda and Mugenda, 2003). In applying the survey design, the researcher aimed at collecting information from respondents about factors influencing the implementation of FSE in order to know the current status of the programme.

Target Population

The target respondents for the study were the secondary school principals in Mumias District. These principals are the people charged with the responsibility of ensuring that FSE is fully operational on the ground in their respective schools. There are 54 secondary schools in the district and therefore my target population was the 54 principals.

Sampling Procedure

According to Nassiuma (2000), simple random sampling represents the most basic statistical sampling technique. Mugenda and Mugenda (2003) say that random sampling is the key to obtaining a representative sample. Ghauri and Gronhaug (2005) and Mugenda and Mugenda (2003) say that sample size is influenced by such factors as the number of variables in the study, the type of research design, the method of data analysis and the size of the accessible population.

Most experts suggest sample sizes of between 10-30 % (Mugenda and Mugenda, 2003). Taking the upper limit of 30 % against my accessible population of 54 gives a sample of 16 cases. According to Mugenda and Mugenda (2003), the smaller the sample, the bigger the sampling error. That is the discrepancy between the ample characteristics and those of the population. To help reduce this error, the sample size was adjusted to 30 cases.

Research Instrument

The questionnaire was the preferred instrument because it guaranteed the uniformity of data. It was an appropriate instrument because all the respondents were literate and capable of answering the items written in simple English language. The questionnaire had six sections in total. These include biographic data of respondents and five sections covering the five research objectives and questions. The questionnaire had standardized questions and required both standard answers and free answers. An understanding of some of the questionnaire responses was gained through unstructured observation.

Validity of Research Instrument

A pre-test where 3-5 cases of respondents were used to test understanding, difficulty of questions and willingness to respond was done to increase validity of this tool (Ghauri and Gronhaug, 2005). Pre-testing made terms or language clear and tested the accuracy and sustainability of the instrument. This therefore generated adequate data. It also got rid of irrelevant and sensitive items in tool. Respondents in the pre-test / preliminary survey were randomly selected from the target population. To avoid problems brought about by test and retest, these respondents were not be used in the final survey. To ensure content validity, the questionnaire was given to both a research and an education expert to check whether all the major factors in free education have been captured.

Their corrections together with those from the pre-test were incorporated in the final questionnaire.

Reliability of Research Instrument

Best (1981) defines reliability as the quality of consistency that an instrument demonstrates over time. Use of questionnaire is reliable as it brings with it uniformity of questions to respondents both in their number and language construction.

Mugenda and Mugenda (2003) say that a questionnaire is in most cases a reliable tool to collect data since there is uniformity in the questions. A split-half method was applied to test for reliability. This is where the items in the instrument are divided into two sub groups of even and odd numbered items. These are given to a few respondents and the results correlated. In this case, Pearson's correlation coefficient was applied. A strong correlation of 0.86 was obtained. The split-half is a better method of testing reliability because test-retest brings with it errors due to intervening factors and time. Also split-half enabled the researcher to administer the questionnaire once reducing costs and time spent.

The Findings

Management Capacity

The management capacity of the principals is very important in the implementation of free secondary education. Warner and Palfreyman (1996) said that to manage secondary schools, the head teachers (principals) require strong professional financial knowledge and support services for their successful management. This came out clearly in the study. Although 56% of the respondents felt that they were adequately prepared to manage schools during their college training, all of them felt they needed more training in order to work well.

In this study, 60% of the respondents needed training in financial management (budgeting, journal entries, and accounting), 30% in human resource management, and 20% in information technology (I.T) as main areas. Although the percentages are lower, they still reflect the need for training as established by Wanyonyi (2004) and Chepkonga (2006). In his study Wanyonyi found out that 85% of the respondents had only attended a two day seminar dealing with management of finances. This is definitely inadequate training. According to Chepkonga, 80.9% of the respondents needed training in accounting and 93% in budget preparation. All these is in line with the assertion by Levacic(1995) that head teachers need training in management and cost accounting, financial accounting and budgeting.

There is therefore a clear indication that the school principals require capacity building in management in general and financial management in particular. Their limited capacity currently limits their ability to achieve a greater percentage in the set goals of free secondary education. In the sample, 50% of the schools take two years or more before inspection by the ministry of education and this could jeopardize their effective management irrespective of the qualifications and abilities of the principals. This is similar to what Barasa (2007) said that the ministry may not be available to conduct audits and even where they do, they are corrupted to conceal cases of mismanagement.

Delays in Disbursement

Very long delays in giving schools money for the term (as late as the third month of the term) are common. This was found to have a negative effect on learning as the schools reach levels where crucial learning materials lack in the schools. According to the ministry of education, circular no. MOE/ G1 / 1 / 44, the money is supposed to be in the schools in December, April and August. That means the preceding months before opening of the school terms respectively.

Another negative effect is the fact that students have to be sent home more regularly for the school levies so that the principals could use these funds to run the schools. This resulted in many learners missing lessons and some eventually dropping out of school. This has a negative influence on the implementation of free secondary education.

Board of Governors

In general, about 89% of the respondents had confidence in the management ability of their Boards of Governors (BOG). At the same time, 95% of the BOGs were found to be making positive contributions to the growth of the schools in general and increasing enrolment in particular.

Among their contributions include sensitization of the local communities on enrolling the children in the schools, coming up with sound management policies, making financial contributions(both personal and outsourced), staff motivation and setting standards of achievement and admission in the schools. The study established that 99%of the BOGs were having either a good or very good working relationship with both the principals and the Parents Teachers' associations (PTA).The principals viewed these positive relationships as having made their work of administration as well as of FSE implementation easier. The BOGs can be said to have a positive contribution to implementation of the free secondary education. This contrasts with what Wangatho (2007) found out.

In his study, a majority of the BOGs were not making positive contribution to the growth of the schools. It can be assumed that this boils down to how to the constitution of membership. It also contrasts both Kuria and Onyango (2006) and Kilemi and Osita(1999).

The former found out that BOGs are not giving necessary leadership that would promote quality management in the schools while the later said that there exists a disharmony between the principals and BOGs that leads to haphazard running of schools.

Socio-Economic Factors

The study found out that a number of socio-economic factors were leading to school drop outs and therefore reversing the gains made by FSE towards increasing enrolment, retention and completion rates. A lot of the girls are still dropping out of school due to pregnancies with no proper mechanisms on their follow up after delivering. Other students are dropping out due to their poor discipline and others because of failure to pay school levies. Whereas these were the major causes, drug abuse was also cited as minor cause of drop outs. In his study Wanyonyi (2004) found out that despite the freeness of education, there were still many school dropouts. These were due to parental negligence, lack of interest in education and early marriages including and pregnancies.

This means that there is need for some compulsion so that enrolments are retained. Such compulsion will also ensure that money is not wasted on the learners who finally drop out. However other socio-economic factors such as school income projects as well as donor funds help many learners to stay in school. These therefore have a positive impact towards the achievement of FSE goals of increasing enrolment and retention in secondary schools. At an average of 41.5% fees payment parents are failing in meeting their obligations. This leads to some of the students dropping out of school. This reflects the findings of Kilonzo (2007) that 92.5% of the parents were unwilling to pay any money to the schools because education was 'free'.

This negates the goals of FSE implementation. Moreover, non payment by most parents limits the putting up of infrastructure such libraries and laboratories. Interestingly, the coming of FSE has led to increased enrolment thereby overstretching available facilities. Inadequate libraries and laboratories have led to damage and loss of materials. This has limited the attainment of set target. For example no school has attained the year 2009 textbook ratio of 1:1 despite the study being done in mid 2010.

Enrolment

The study found out that FSE had led to increased enrolment and retention in secondary schools. All the respondents had recorded a steady increase in the period 2008-2010. Out of these, 99% assigned the increase to FSE with only 1% saying it was due to the good KCSE results posted by their schools. However, all sampled schools were recording improving performance which they assigned to the fact that students were staying in school more and had better learning materials as a result of FSE. The funds have also ensured the prompt payment of the non teaching staff resulting in a cordial working relationship that gives the principal ease of management.

Conclusion

FSE needs further allocation of funds. Only funds for exercise books from the tuition vote head were unanimously seen to be very sufficient. The government needs to strive to ensure the FSE funds are in school accounts well before the term starts to enable proper planning and procurement processes. FSE has led to increased enrolment resulting in the overstretching of facilities and inadequacy of the teaching staff. This may compromise the quality of learning for the students in the schools. It has also forced principals to use money for school development on wages for the teachers hired by the school. Parents are unwilling to pay any levies to meet their obligations. This has running of the schools very difficult for the principals. Well constituted BOGs can play a very significant role in the management and growth of schools. As much as the government has reduced the burden of fees payment for parents and therefore led to increased enrolment, retention is still threatened by many socio-economic factors that lead to dropping out of school.

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