



Stakeholders' Perception on the Freeness of Fee-Free Education in Ordinary Secondary Schools: A Case of Rombo District, Tanzania

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Abstract: This study sought to establish stakeholders' perception on the freeness of Fee-Free Education among Ordinary Secondary Schools in Rombo District, Tanzania through the mixed research design where both qualitative and quantitative data were collected and analysed concurrently. The population of the study included teachers, heads of schools and parents as they are directly responsible to day to day implementation of fee free education. The study established a need for financial contributions from parents and the community at large because the amount of fund that is allocated by the government is not sufficient. Parents indicated financial difficulties and that the contributions were too high. Therefore there is a need to create a better way of involving parents and the community in supporting education financially. The study further established that politicians kept on interfering with the success of the contributions from parents and the community for them to gain popularity on the argument that education is free, hence parents should not contribute anything. The study recommends that the government needs to establish a proper involvement mechanism that will be a guide to finance basic education.

Keywords: Fee-Free Education; Contributions; Fund; Parents; Communities

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Introduction

Education has been considered as one of human rights in many countries though it is not available for everyone. The provision of fee-free education comes as a way of making education accessible to everyone. For a long period, governments in the world have been struggling to ensure that the delivery of education is free because education helps people think, feel and behave in a way that contributes to their success and improves their community. Furthermore, education is the vibrant

tool for the alleviation of poverty and ignorance (Emanuel, 2019).

Provision of Fee-free education in Tanzania has been a topic of discussion among different people. The discussion has been centering on the ability of the government to shoulder the responsibility of financing education and meet the international agreements. Just like Tanzania, different nations have been reviewing their policy direction in line with the International Summits Agreement like The Declaration of Education for All (EFA) of Jomtien,

Thailand 5-9 March 1990 and that of Dakar, Senegal 2000 (UNESCO, 1990, 2000). Furthermore, Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) insist on the governments to set policies that ensure reasonable provision of education and to the best of it, basic education should be free of charge (Goldstein, 2004; UNESCO-IBE, 2007). Therefore, governments are urged to increase their budget allocation for education investment (UNESCO, 2012).

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) number four requires governments to ensure equal opportunity in access to quality learning opportunities at all levels of education in a definitive perspective (Mulà & Tilbury, 2009; Bruns, Mingat, & Rakotomalala, 2010; Hulme, 2009; Jones, 1990). These goals require countries to devise strategies to ensure that marginalized children have access to and benefit from quality primary education (Davidson, 2004).

The provision of Fee-Free Education in Tanzania is not a new practice; the government has been making some efforts since independence to make sure that education provision becomes accessible for all school-aged children. In the 1970s, under the Universal Primary Education (UPE), the government provided free education to learners in primary schools, though not by 100 per cent (Omary, Mbise, Mahenge, Malekela, & Beshu, 1983). The practice of UPE in Tanzania was cherished despite the fact that it faced institutional difficulties like the expense and the unstable economic conditions which led to the establishment of cost-sharing programs in 1986 (Davidson, 2004).

Reaching the goals to increase education access under cost sharing aspect seemed difficult in Tanzania. As a result, the government passed a thorough Education and Training Policy (ETP) in 1995 which opened a new outline where the expansion of education was not only necessary but it started to be considered as a right of every citizen, especially school-age children (United Republic of Tanzania, 1995).

The Primary Education Development Plan (PEDP) and Secondary Education Development Plan (SEDP) were developed as one of the efforts to implement ETP 1995. These included provision of free and quality education and increased the number of children completing primary schools and joining secondary school (Davidson, 2004; SEDP, 2004).

Following the success of fee-free education provision for primary schools, the government of

Tanzania revised its Education and Training policy and in 2014. Objective 3.6.1 of the policy stipulates on the need to establish and finance Fee-Free Education Program (United Republic of Tanzania, 2014). The policy has it that basic education includes the primary and ordinary levels of secondary education. Following the declaration of the 2014 Education and Training Policy, the agenda of Fee-Free Education gained the attention of policymakers and politicians. In November 2015, soon after the General Election, the Government officially declared that primary and ordinary secondary education is free. The Fee Free Education took effect from January 2016, following the declaration and a series of government circulars aimed at directing and upholding the decision of implementing Fee-Free Education (United Republic of Tanzania, 2016).

Provision of Fee-Free Education means that all kinds of tuition fees and contributions are abolished and the Government finances the education system through capitation grants (Twaweza, 2018). The concept of Fee-Free Education is subsequently defined by the Educational Circular No. 5 of 2015 as follows: *"provision of free education means learners will not pay any fee or other contributions that were being provided by parents or guardians before the release of the new circular."* This formalized the commitment to the Education and Training Policy of 2014 (SEDP, 2010; United Republic of Tanzania, 2018) and directed public schools to ensure that primary and secondary education is free. This included the removal of all forms of fees and contributions.

The running of the FFE fund was well described in circular No. 6 of 2015 on the orders on the uses of the capitation grants. The guidelines specified the percentage of funds to be used for operational activities of schools basing on whether the amount was allocated for compensation of fees or capitation grants (Benjamin, 2017). The distribution of the funds to schools depends on the number of students enrolled in the particular school since each student has to get 20,000 for compensation of fees and 25,000 for capitation grants thus making the sum of 45,000 TZS per learner per year (Ministry of Finance and Planning, 2016; United Republic of Tanzania, 2018).

Other circulars that went simultaneously with the declarations of FFE include Education Circular No 5 of 2015 (United Republic of Tanzania, 2018), Education Circular No. 6 of 2015 and Education Circular No. 3 of 2016 (United Republic of Tanzania,

2018). These circulars provide directives to the government officers who are the implementers at different levels to empower the implementation of FFE.

The operation of the FFE program in the secondary level of education is aimed at making sure that all students are promoted to higher levels of education, including colleges and universities, and that after completion, they may be prepared to access jobs across countries (Ndunguru, 2018).

The implementation further involves the issue of quality education and teachers' welfare which seem to have been ignored (Kapinga, 2017). The distinguished effect of the implementation is the increased enrolment of students in secondary schools since parents can afford to send their children to secondary education (Ezekiel, 2020; Kapinga, 2017; Marwa, 2019). The increased enrolment rate implies an increased demand for school management and resources like furniture which are necessary for studying.

At the official opening of the Eleventh Parliament, the late president H. E. John Pombe Joseph Magufuli assured parents with children in primary and ordinary secondary schools that they would not be asked to pay any contributions to education from January 2016. The late President Magufuli declared that all necessary funding would be sent directly to schools, adding, "I am certain that those who receive the money will use it well; He said, "I warn them not to misuse it" (TWAWEZA, 2018).

Fee-Free Education has therefore been implemented in Tanzania for 5 years now. While some studies have been done on this endeavor, most of them concentrated on the issues related to challenges in the implementation. For instance, Tweve, (2019) assessed the challenges of implementing Free Education in Ubungu; Abdu, (2020) studied the challenges of implementing Free Education in Nkasi District, Emanuel, (2019) addressed the issue of community involvement in Lushoto District. Other studies focused mainly on stakeholders' perception and financial burden. Shukia (2020) did a study about the need to rethink the provision of FFE in Tanzania, arguing that while the concept is commendable, it should be revised to bring more benefits.

This study sought to explore stakeholders' perception on Fee-Free Education, Fee-Free Education implementation and sufficiency of government funds in order to come up with relevant

recommendations on Fee Free Education in Tanzania.

Methodology

This study employed the mixed research approach using the concurrent triangulation research design where both qualitative and quantitative data were collected and analysed at the same time. The study employed the qualitative approach to get the views of the parents and teachers concerning the implementation of Fee-free education and the quantitative approach to describe the findings in numerical values.

Population and Sampling

The study was conducted in Rombo District, Kilimanjaro Region. The main reason for choosing Rombo was that on 29th of February 2019 when the Prime Minister was addressing the crowd in Tarakea, the citizens were noted to be plaintive concerning being required to pay extra contributions in schools by the head of schools. The Prime Minister insisted that there should not be any contribution by parents. Rombo District has 47 public secondary schools from which 5 schools were randomly selected to be used in this study. The population of the study included teachers and heads of schools (because they are the implementers of Fee-Free education at the school level) as well as parents who are the beneficiaries of the fee-free education. The respondents included 45 teachers, 10 parents and 5 heads of schools bringing a total of 60. The sample size of 60 met the threshold of a minimum sample size of 30 suggested by Cohen, Manion and Morrison, (2020).

Instruments

While the interview was administered to heads of schools and parents, a questionnaire was self-administered to teachers and document review involved joining instructions, parent-teacher meeting minutes and circulars released by the government.

Validity and Reliability

The researchers gave the instruments to research experts for scrutiny prior to data collection. The tools were translated from English to Kiswahili for easy understanding, especially for parents. Validity and reliability were further ensured through triangulation.

Statistical Treatment of Data

Qualitative data was analysed through the thematic approach while quantitative data was analysed using descriptive statistics.

Ethical Considerations

For the case of ethical issues, the researchers obtained the introduction letter from the University of Dodoma to facilitate a request for permission from Local Government Authorities; hence the permit was obtained. Research ethics were put into consideration when developing instruments and when administering data collection to avoid any form of harm, suffering or violation of human rights.

Findings and Discussion

The results are presented according to the three themes: Perception on Fee-Free Education, Fee-Free Education Implementation and Sufficiency of Government Funds.

Perception on Fee-Free Education

Respondents were supposed to express their perception on free education. Through

questionnaire, teachers were asked to tick one item that best described free education as appears in table 1.

According to Table 1, teachers felt that free education means learners should not pay fees or any other contribution. Therefore, the general understanding of fee-free education by teachers is that the government should bear the whole financial burden in the provision of education. Parents and community members should not be involved in any contributions, be it a fee or any other form of contribution. During interview sessions, informants also explained how they understood fee-free education. One of them had it that free education is “the kind of education that pupils or students will not pay any fee or any other contribution that were being provided by parents or guardians before” (Interviewee 1: Head of School).

Table 1: Understanding of Fee Free Education

SN	Understanding	F	%
1	Learners should not pay fee or other contributions	22	48.9
2	No more contributions are to be paid by parents	18	40.0
3	Parents should participate in contributing to some school affairs but not by force	4	8.9
4	Removal of all kinds of fees; the government should cater for school running costs	1	2.2
Total		45	100.0

In an interview, parents explained that FFE “is education system in which the parent does not contribute anything to the school.” Another parent went further saying: “It is education in which a child is provided with everything by the government such as fees, food, uniforms, learning materials etc., where the parent doesn’t contribute anything to the school.” In addition, one of the heads of schools gave the meaning of FFE as “education that the government pays for education and parents do not contribute anything to school.”

These findings correspond with the definition of fee-free education according to the Educational Circular No. 3 of 2016, which state: “Provision of free education means pupils or students will not pay any fee or other contributions that were being provided by parents or guardians before the release of the circular No 5 of 2015” (United Republic of Tanzania, 2016). Therefore, understanding of the research respondents about fee-free education is in line with the meaning provided by the authority.

Fee-Free Education Implementation

The second theme sought to establish the extent to which fee-free education was free. Through

questionnaire, findings revealed that schools involved in the study were still asking for the parents’ contributions. This was supported by the interview responses from the parents and heads of schools who also agreed that there were contributions from parents. The reason given by the heads of schools for the initiation of these contributions is that the funds provided by the government was not sufficient and the money provided was coming with the conditions dictating how it should be used. This is supported by findings by Lyanga and Chen (2020), Lindsjö, (2018) and Marwa, (2019) who found out that the implementation of Fee-Free Education came to be a financial burden to schools which demanded parents to contribute.

Through documents, it was revealed in the joining instruction and minutes that parents were still contributing some money. The contributions were initiated by the school management and approved by the parents through formal meetings. As reflected in table 2, the types of contributions that schools received from parents included money for food, for science teachers, for construction, for

weekly tests, for school t-shirts and for realms of papers.

Findings from teachers further indicated that parents were reluctant to contribute due to little awareness concerning FFE and limited financial ability. Most of parents that were interviewed indicated that their monthly income did not satisfy their basic needs. Another reason that hindered parents' contribution was political interference

where it was noted that politicians tended to give statements that discouraged parents to contribute. Therefore, some parents thought that they were not required to contribute anything to schools. This finding was supported by study findings by Bina Tieng'o, (2020) in Rorya District and Emanuel, (2019) in Lushoto District who found out that there was limited response of the community to participate in the school development issues.

Table 2: Contributions in Schools

School	Type of Contribution	Amount per year
School 1	Food	81,400/=
	Science teachers	14,000/=
	Construction	10,000/=
	Weekly exams	10,000/=
	Total	115,000/=
School 2	School T-shirt	10,000/=
	A Ream of paper	10,000/=
	Food	80,000/=
	Science teachers	10,000/=
	Classroom construction	20,000/=
	Total	130,000/=

Sufficiency of Government Funds

The study further investigated whether the amount of funds allocated for schools by the government was sufficient for the school budget. Through questionnaire, majority of teachers revealed that the amount given to school by the government was not enough to handle financial demands in schools under investigation. This was supported by the heads of schools who through interview added that the school budget was higher than the amount allocated by the government. For example, one school had a budget of TZS 3,567,000/= per month but the government was only providing TZS 1,400,000/= which was not even half of the school budget demands. This was the reason why schools initiated contribution plans from parents in the name of cost sharing.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Conclusions

It is concluded that there is a massing gap among community members regarding community participation in provision of education through financial support. There is a contradiction in the mind of community members between "Fee Free Education" and "Free education. The community need to bear in mind that fee free education still needs their financial support for sustainable running

of educational institutions in the country. Finally, capitation grants from government authorities are not satisfactory to cater for financial demands of the schools under investigation.

Recommendations

Basing on the conclusions above, it is recommended that the government needs to establish a proper involvement mechanism that will be a guide to finance basic education. The mechanisms may not be uniform across the country because of cultural diversity of Tanzanian communities but the strategy to be developed should clear the misunderstanding among community members regarding what Fee Free Education actually means. The participatory mechanisms to be established must be user-friendly and relevant to the context in order to avoid burdening parents and the communities. More importantly, the political class should refrain from confusing the process of education provision in an attempt to gain popularity since the same popularity can be obtained through meaningful involvement of the parents and communities in provision of education.

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