

Challenges facing Primary School Head Teachers preparedness in Management of Free Primary Education in Siaya County, Kenya

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Abstract

The aim of free primary education (FPE) was to provide more school opportunities for all children. In pursuit of this policy objective, the government of Kenya introduced FPE in January 2003, resulting to increased enrolment from 5.9 million in 2002 to 7.2 million in 2004. This led to extra administrative duties for head teachers and continued administrative challenges in management of FPE programme related to lack of clear policy framework, management skills, interpretation of government policies. The purpose of this study was to identify challenges facing primary school headteachers in management of FPE, with the following specific objectives; to establish head teachers preparedness in management of FPE in Siaya sub-county, to identify training required by head teachers to manage FPE and to assess stake holders participation in management of FPE in Siaya sub-county. The study employed descriptive survey design. Population consisted of 130 public primary school head teachers, one sub county auditor and one sub quantity assurance and standard officer (SCQASO). Stratified sampling technique was used to obtain a sample of 43 public primary schools. Questionnaire, in-depth interview and observation schedule was used for data collection. Quantitative data was analyzed by use of descriptive statistics, frequencies, percentages, pie charts and graph, while content analysis was used to analyze qualitative data. The findings established that head teachers were not adequately prepared to manage FPE, headteachers also needed to be equipped with management skills to effectively manage FPE. Lastly, stakeholders did not fully support management of FPE. Based on the findings, it was recommended that head teachers should extensively be trained in management of FPE, Quality assurance and standards officers and auditors should be financially empowered to train head teachers on management of FPE and stakeholders should be trained in their role in management of FPE.

Key words Free primary, challenges, head teachers, management, education

Introduction

The term Free Primary Education (FPE) refers to the granting of more school opportunities especially to children from economically challenged families (UNESCO, 1999). FPE is a programme where the government and donor partners provide instructional material, textbooks and minimum physical facilities while parents provide uniforms, general upkeep of the pupils and other basic school needs to enable children of all ages complete the primary cycle of education (MoEST, 2003).

Free Primary Education is therefore a fundamental right to which governments committed themselves under the 1989 convention of the right of the child (UNESCO, 2003). FPE is therefore ensuring continuity of education by removing all major barriers that stop children of school going-age from accessing and completing primary education.

The goal of achieving Universal Primary Education (UPE) has been on the international agenda since the Universal Declaration of the human rights of 1948, which stated that the basic education was to be made free and available for all children in all nations. This objective was re-affirmed subsequently on many occasions, by international treaties and United Nations Conference Declarations (UNCD) (UNESCO, 2003). The World Conference on Education for all (EFA) held in Jomtien, Thailand in 1990 was an impelling force towards basic education, especially with its so called vision and re-energized commitment.

Most countries globally have primary education as a priority. In United States of America, for instance, elementary school is free and compulsory to all children (World Education Service, 2004). In Africa, developing countries like Malawi, Uganda and Lesotho had declared primary education free (World Bank, 2004).

Africa's first international conference on education was held in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, in 1961, where heads of states set 1980 as the year when African states would achieve UPE. In Kenya, the Kenya African National Union (KANU) campaigns in 1960s and its manifesto stated the provision of UPE upon attainment of independence (Bogonko, 1992). The first National Development Plan, 1964-1969, highlighted the need to expand education in the country. In December 1973, President Jomo Kenyatta issued a decree making primary education free from standard I-IV, and also abolished fees in primary I-IV (Sifuna, 2005). This decree led to increased enrolment which overstretched the existing facilities. To cope with the inadequacy of

facilities, school committees introduced a building levy which turned out to be higher than the school fee charged previously (Muthwii, 2004).

In 1978, Kenya re-stated her commitment maintain UPE as a standing educational objective of the new government. National Development Plan (1979-1983). Primary education was found to be the foundation of economic and national development. Government stated its objective to provide UPE for seven years, free of charge to all children of primary school age. The government also aimed to abolish building and other school funds in primary schools (Republic of Kenya, 1979). This policy ensured that primary education was free by abolishing all loopholes such as charging building levy. As a result of this situation, primary education continued to witness rapid development with Kenya achieving near UPE by the 1990s (Oketch and Rolleston, 2007). However, in the subsequent years of the struggles, many of the gains were lost or reversed for reasons such as economic decline due to the introduction of structural adjustment programme. This led to the introduction of cost sharing in education. Enrolment and participation rates at primary level declined between 1990 and 2000, and transition rate stagnated. With that background, the national alliance rainbow coalition (NARC) government which was elected in 2002 pledged to provide free primary education for all in its 2002 manifesto (OWM and Associates, 2004).

Kenya re-introduced FPE in 2003 with a view to establishing UPE and meeting the education for all and millennium development goals (MDGs) target of universal access to primary education by 2015. On the 6th day of January 2003, Kenya government declared primary education free and all that was required was for every child regardless of age and sex to attend school. This resulted in increased enrolment of children leading to overcrowded classrooms, high pupil-teacher ratio and overstretched physical facilities (UNESCO, 2005). A study by Yieke (2006) revealed teething challenges mentioned above. With the increase in the number of children in public primary schools and the demand for extra administrative duties, head teachers continued to experience challenges in the management of FPE programme related to lack of clear policy framework, management skills and interpretation of policy. Given this background, it was necessary to conduct a study on the challenges facing primary school headteachers in the management of FPE in Siaya sub-county.

Statement of the problem

The government of Kenya and development partners have availed huge amounts of money to finance free primary education. However, headteachers of public primary schools in Siaya Sub county are faced with administrative, financial and management problem such as mismanagement and abuse of the funds. A study by UNESCO (2005) on challenges of implementing FPE in Kenya cited lack of preparedness by headteachers, lack of training of heads of schools in financial management and use of resources, lack of support from key stakeholders and sufficient allocation of FPE funds. This study will focus on primary education and to find out if specific problems in schools are prevalent in Siaya Sub County.

Head teachers Role and preparedness in effective management of FPE

The work of Okumbe (2011) states that free primary education allows children access to education without discrimination, because the government removed major obstacles that used to hinder children of school age going from accessing and completing primary education. E reports also that fees and levies for tuition in primary schools were abolished (Okumbe 2011). However, the actual interpretation of FPE means different things in different countries. A study by UNESCO (2005) found that many house hold in Africa still meet direct costs in order to access education for their children. This raises the question whether FPE really exists in developing countries. Nevertheless, according to Mondo (2003) FPE is the provision of primary education to all children of school going age. A report by the Republic of Uganda stressed that in providing Universal Primary Education the following must be granted. Access, equity, quality, and relevance of this education. (Republic of Uganda 1998, cited in UNESCO 2004).

According to FAO, UNESCO and IIEP 2004. Free Primary Education was found to be dogged with new teething problems that made the goal set far from being achieved. Krause (2006) quoting Tirozzi stressed the role of principal in determining school success, after having realized the important role played by the head teachers of elementary and high schools. In another study by UNESCO on challenges of implementation of FPE, it was revealed that head teachers of primary schools were caught unaware by the announcement of FPE. The study did not however, established the role of head teachers in the management of the program and further did not find out head teachers preparedness in the management of a new program.

A study by Ridell (2003) revealed that several Sub Saharan countries had abolished primary school fees as a way of energizing their declining education system. The purpose of the study was to find out if African countries were prepared to manage FPE program but did not find out if head teachers were prepared to manage the program. The present study went further to establish the role of the head teacher in management of the program and the challenges facing them in their role. In March 2003, the Government of Kenya disbursed 6.8 million shillings as emergency grant to provide for basic education classroom needs including instructional materials. UNICEF also donated Kshs .5 million and the UK department for International Development Agency (SIDA), The World Food Program (WFP), 13.9 million and Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries *OPEC) gave 9.9 million to the success of this programme (MOEST, 2005), but principals were not trained to handle such funds. This created a challenge of their ability to plan, organize and budget how to utilize the funds. Lack of effectiveness in preparation made many children have difficulty in coping with learning.

Although FPE opened the doors to many children to enroll in schools, it did not provide for the needs of children with disabilities. Head teachers were not prepared to handle inclusive education. Very few schools had facilities for the children with various disabilities like hearing aids or Braille materials. The school building and specifically the toilets were not conducive for use by the physically disabled children. Neither was the teaching and learning environment responsive to their needs. UNESCO (2005) reported that primary school head teachers had a challenge in the control of overage pupils since most of them had inadequate skills in guidance and counseling. It was difficult for the overage to adjust to the classroom environment. Some felt embarrassed when younger pupils outperform them. This study investigated the competency required by head teachers to manage children with special needs.

While FPE increased participation, it had also created some considerable challenges to primary school head teachers. It worsened the problem of teaching and learning facilities. As a result of the Free Primary Education, many head teachers found it very difficult to manage their schools. Teachers complained of increased pupil teacher ratio and many of the schools were understaffed. This did not augur well for the quality of education delivered which was beyond the head teacher control due to lack of unpreparedness (Ajowi 2011).

Methodology

Descriptive survey research design was adopted for the study. The area of study was Siaya sub county, Kenya, with a target population of 130 head teachers, one SCQASO and one Auditor. Data was collected using the Questionnaire, in depth interviews schedule and observation schedule (Kombo and Tromp2006). Stratified sampling technique was used to obtain a sample of 43 public primary school head teachers and saturated sampling for one SCQASO and one Auditor. The instruments were validated then piloting done in four public primary schools in Siaya Sub county which were not part of the study sample. Quantitative data was analyzed by use of descriptive statistics, frequencies and percentages, while content analysis was used to analyze qualitative data.

Table 1. Sampling Techniques

Respondents	Population	Sample	Percentages
Schools	130	43	33.3%
Head teachers	130	43	33.3%
District Auditor	1	1	100.0 %
District QUASO	1	1	100.0%

Source DEOs office Siaya District

The method was useful for this study because the sample reflected the characteristics of the population from which it was drawn.

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Summary of the Findings

Head teachers' preparedness for the management of FPE

Head teachers were asked to respond to the question on their preparedness to manage FPE. To obtain the information, primary school head teachers were asked to respond to the questionnaire whether they were prepared as shown in Table 2.

Table 2: Headteachers response on preparedness

Education level of headteachers

Education level	Head teachers (n=43) Frequency (f)	Percentage (%)
Masters degree	1	2.32
Bachelors Degree	5	11.62
Diploma	8	18.60
Secondary	29	67.44
Total 43		

Based on the results in table 2, 1 (2.32%) head teachers had Masters Degree, 5(11.62%) had Bachelors degree, 8 (18.60%) had Diploma and majority 29 (67.44%) headteachers had obtained secondary level of education. No headteachers had less than secondary level education. According to circular from MoEST (2012) the academic requirement for primary school headship was Diploma. This showed the majority of the head teachers did not meet the academic requirement for heading primary schools.

Work experience in headship

The headteachers were asked to indicate their work experience in the management position to which they responded as shown in Table 3.

From table 3, it emerged that majority of the respondents had worked for a long time and therefore had adequate experience to manage FPE effectively as they had understanding of how to cope with challenges experienced in management of FPE. The sub county QASO and the sub county auditor concurred with the response of the head teachers that majority had adequate experience to have been in a position to effectively manage FPE. Despite this, the education officers stated that some of the head teachers still faced challenges in management of FPE.

Adequate preparedness

The head teachers were asked to indicate the adequacy of preparedness in effective management of FPE. Their response was as shown in table 3.

Table 3: adequacy of preparedness

Response	Head teachers (n=43) (F)	Percentage (%)
Strongly agree	8	18.60
Agree	27	62.79
Disagree	0	0
Strongly disagree	8	18.60
Total	43	

From table 3, it was revealed that 8 (18.60%) head teachers strongly agreed that they were adequately prepared to manage FPE, 27 (62.79%) responded that they agreed, none disagreed, while 8 (18.60%) head teachers strongly disagreed that they were adequately prepared to manage FPE. When interviewed, some head teachers stated that they feared being open that indeed, the preparedness was not adequate as they did not want to be victimized. This meant that the level of preparedness could only be measured or reflected in the effective management of the schools in the sub county.

Challenges related to head teachers preparedness in effective management

To establish challenges related to preparedness in relation to adequacy of resources head teachers were asked to rate the adequacy of resources in their schools. Table 4 shows how they responded.

Table 4: Rating of adequacy of resources

Resources	Adequate		Inadequacy	
	Frequency (F)	Percentage (%)	Frequency (F)	Percentage (%)
Classroom	1	2.32	42	97.67
Sanitation facilities	1	2.32	42	97.67
Desks	9	20.93	34	79.06
Teachers	3	6.97	40	93

Based on the results on table 4, the findings revealed that the adequacy of resources in schools in Siaya county was wanting. 40 (93%) head teachers responded that teachers who had human resource were not adequate, 42 (97.67%) responded that sanitation facilities were inadequate and 34 (79.06%) head teachers responded that desks were inadequate.

Adequate provision was very important in effective management of FPE and without that, it showed that primary schools head teachers in Siaya county were not prepared for effective management of FPE.

More importantly, 1 (2.32%) out of 43 head teachers responded that sanitation facilities were adequate and this happened to be a boarding school that got maximum support from sponsors. This was against the MoEST (2003) guidelines which recommended a ratio of 1:25 for girls and 1:30 for boys. According to Sub County Quality Assurance and Standards Officer, inadequacy of

sanitation facilities was one of the challenges affecting the management of FPE in the sub county.

Discussion

According to Nyaegah (2011) study on challenges facing management of FPE, relates with this study as it observed that education sector was faced with many challenges including finance, inadequate teachers, inadequate sanitation facilities and inadequate learning facilities. The study concentrated on government preparedness while the present study looked at head teachers' preparedness to manage FPE.

UNESCO (2005) cited lack of preparedness for head teachers in management of FPE. The study was however done in Kisumu which is more urban compared to Siaya which is more rural.

Training needs in management of FPE

Head teachers play a key role in effective management of schools. Head teachers as managers of public institutions need to be equipped with skills in management. Head teachers were asked to state in likert scale 1-5: e.g. strongly agree 5, agree 4, disagree 3, strongly disagree 2 and whether they needed training in management of FPE and their response was as shown on table 5.

Table 5: Head teachers need training in management of FPE

Head teachers (N=43)		
Need training	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly agree	25	58.13
Agree	16	37.20
Disagree	0	0
Strongly disagree	2	4.65
Total	43	

Based on the results on the table 8, the study findings revealed that 25 (58.13%) of head teachers in Siaya sub county strongly agreed that they needed training on management of FPE, 16

(37.20%) agreed they needed training, while 2 (4.65%) responded that they strongly disagreed that they needed training on management of FPE. The 2 head teachers, stated that they had numerous challenges on management of skills such as lack of skills in book keeping and therefore hired book keepers to write their books of accounts. Sub County Auditor and QASO concurred by stating that primary school head teachers needed training in management of FPE. They stated that the training offered by KEMI needed to be extensive to equip head teachers with adequate skills to enable them effectively manage FPE. Despite attending the KEMI course head teachers still relied on hired experts to write their books of accounts.

Training in financial management

Head teachers are the chief accounting officer in schools (Republic of Kenya, 2005). The head teachers were asked to respond to the questionnaire on whether they were trained in financial management or not. Table 6 shows the responses.

Table 6: Head teachers' responses on training on financial management

Head teachers (n=43)		
Trained in financial management	Frequency (f)	Percentage (%)
Highly trained	1	2.32
Trained properly	26	60.46
Not adequately trained	1	2.32
Not trained	15	34.88
Total	43	

The study findings revealed that 1 (2.32%) was highly trained in financial management, majority 26 agreed that they were trained. 1 (2.32%) responded that they were not properly trained, while 15 (34.88%) reported that they were not trained on financial management. An interview with sub county auditor revealed that head teachers were not skilled in financial management. The auditor also revealed that newly appointed head teachers did not get any induction of financial

management and that was a challenge in management of FPE. This concurred with Abagi (2000). He further revealed that Kenya Management Institute (KEMI) had initiated training for head teachers whose objective was to equip them with management skills. The training according to the auditor was not adequate. This concurred with SSCQASO's response during interview that head teachers were not adequately trained in financial management

Discussion

As managers head teachers were to ensure efficiency in performance, prudent utilization of resources and effective management of FPE programme to achieve the desired education goals and targets. Teachers Service Commission act (cap 12) of 1980 and the TSC Code of Conduct for Teachers clearly defines the responsibilities of head teachers. One of responsibilities was to account for and control school resources. This can only be effective if head teachers have adequate skills in management. The Kenya Education Management Capacity Assessment KEMACA (2008) study in education sector to find out capacity constraints in head teachers and education officials looked at skill to effectively manage FPE. The finding of the present study was similar to those of KEMACA (2008) report.

UNESCO (2005) relates to this study as it found that head teachers were not adequately prepared and equipped with skills to effectively implement FPE. Stakeholders' participation in the management of FPE Schools Management Committee (SMC), Parents Association and Board of Governors are key stakeholders in the management of FPE. Head teachers were asked to respond on the participation of the key stake holders in management of their schools. The responses were as shown on table 7.

Table 7: Stake holders support in management of FPE

Support	Frequency (f)	Percentage (%)
Strongly agree	1	2.32
Agree	2353.48	

Disagree	00
Strongly disagree	1841.86
Total	43

From table 7 the findings revealed that 2 (4.65%) head teachers strongly agreed that stakeholders supported their schools, while majority of head teachers 23 (53.48%) indicated that they agreed key stakeholders supported the schools. Some head teachers 18 (41.86%) strongly disagreed that key stakeholders supported the schools.

Communities' attitude towards FPE

In the interviews carried out to find out the communities' attitude about FPE, diverse response from head teachers included 10 (23.25%) responded that the attitude was that the government provided everything in schools, 5 (11.62%) head teachers responded that the community attitude was negative as they felt that the government ought to have taken full management of schools, other 28 (65.11%) responded that the community felt they were revealed of all payments. The 2% and 23% head teachers who responded that key stakeholders supported their schools stated that despite the positive attitude, the parents misconceived the idea of FPE. From the head teachers' responses, most communities were supportive. During the interview session carried out, the head teachers stated that the communities were positive provided that they had control over what they had provided as they had no faith in head teachers.

Discussion

Education was a basic right for all children as indicated in the Children's Act of 2011. It was therefore important that the education should be supported by all stakeholders to enable all children to access school without discrimination. SMC and BOG were mandated by the Education Act (1980) to regulate expenditure of the school to ensure that all the income received was used as per the objectives of the school. (Republic of Kenya, 2005). The government of Kenya through MoEST organizes in-service courses for head teachers on management. It is important to note that SMC and BOG who are the key stakeholders to management are always left out. This has made implementation and management of FPE often wanting due to the incompetence of the key stakeholders.

A study by UNESCO (2005) on challenges facing implementation of FPE revealed that parent misconceived FPE to mean that everything was free and their duty was to send their children to school. The study revealed that the parents no longer contributed money to support the schools. The finding was not consistent with the present study as the findings of the present study revealed that majority of communities in Siaya sub-county were willing to support FPE. This was majorly in schools in urban regions. Negativity was found to be in rural schools whose enrolment was low. This revelation meant that majority of parents were willing to support FPE in Siaya Sub County and therefore needed to be equipped with management skills and proper interpretation of the government policies through seminars and in-service courses.

Conclusion

Based on the study findings, the following conclusions were made;

- i. Majority of head teachers in Siaya Sub County did not have minimum academic qualification for headship that is diploma in education.
- ii. Head teachers were not adequately prepared for management of FPE.
- iii. Deputy head teachers and SMC were not trained in management of FPE.
- iv. Majority of key stake holders supported FPE.

Lastly the study had confirmed:

- i. That training offered by KEMI was not adequate.
- ii. That supervision of management of FPE by Sub County Education Officers was not adequate due to inadequate staff and funds for transport.
- iii. That FPE in the Sub County was not effectively managed in some schools.
- iv. Inadequate resources in public primary schools in the sub county.

FPE was done hurriedly as the NARC government did not carry out situation analysis prior to introduction. Until the above conditions were met, FPE may not be well managed to achieve the intended objectives.

Finally, the study has confirmed that head teachers had not been adequately prepared to manage FPE in Siaya Sub County.

Recommendations

The following are the recommendations of the study on challenges facing head teachers in management of FPE.

- i. Head teachers should be equipped with extensive training to effectively manage FPE.

- ii. Government should allocate funds for induction of new head teachers and consistent training of head teachers and deputy head teachers to QASOs and auditors to ensure continuity.
- iii. Allocation of funds should not be per child but school needs as allocation per child disadvantages schools with low enrolment.
- iv. Roles of stake holders should be clearly defined by training SMCs and BOGs to avoid conflict in management.

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