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Challenges Facing Implementation of New Education Policies in Government Primary Schools: The Case of Fee Free Education Policy in Gairo District

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Abstract: The study sought to find out the challenges facing the implementation of Fee - Free Education Policy in public Primary schools in Gairo District. The Fee - Free education policy has been in operation for seven years and has evidenced by an increase in pupils' enrolment at all levels of education; however, the implementation of this policy has led to many challenges related to teaching and administration in daily school activities that this study intended to find out. The guiding specific objective were: to identify teaching - based challenges facing the implementation of fee free education policy. This study was qualitative in which the case study research design was employed. The study participants were 40. The data were collected through semi structured interviews, focus group discussions, and documentary review. The analysis of data was conducted thematically. The study found that overcrowding in classrooms, inadequate teaching and learning materials, and teachers' heavy teaching workload were the teaching - based challenges facing teachers in implementing fee free basic education policy. It is therefore recommended that the government to rethink on the mode of providing fee free basic education by involving wider community in the decision - making process. The study also recommends that the amount of capitation grants be increased and disbursed to schools on time.

Keywords: Policy, Education Policy, Fee Free Basic Education Policy, Fee - Free Education, Capitation Grants

1. Introduction

Since independence in 1961, Tanzania has made public education a national priority, prompting waves of related policy changes and investment strategies. In 2016 the government of the United Republic of Tanzania adopted the fee free education policy with the aim of making basic education (pre - primary, primary and ordinary level secondary education) fee free. Fee - Free education means a system of education offering where the government compensates tuition fees for school children through capitation grants (URT, 2016). In this regard parents or guardians are obliged to meet other requirements for their children such as school uniforms, learning materials (such as pens, exercise books and pencils), medical expenses and travel expenses. Despite the success of the Fee - Free Education Policy in the seven consecutive years of its implementation as evidenced by an increase in pupils' enrolment at all levels of education; implementation of this policy has led to many challenges related to teaching and administration in daily school activities. Most of the cited literature showed the implementation of fee - free basic education policy in lower secondary schools in Tanzania, this therefore, made the current study to deal with challenges that face the implementation of fee - free basic education in primary schools. Therefore, this study aimed to investigate challenges facing the implementation of new educational policy in selected government primary schools in the Gairo district - Morogoro and propose remedial measures to be taken by the government and the community to alleviate those challenges

2. General Objective

The general objective of this study was to investigate the challenges facing the implementation of new education policies in public primary schools in Gairo District - Morogoro.

3. Methodology and research design

This study was qualitative in which the case study research design was employed. The study participants were 28. The data were collected through semi structured interviews, focus group discussions, and documentary review.

4. Findings and Discussion

4.1. Teaching based challenges facing the implementation of fee freebasic education policy in primary schools.

This study found that majority of the respondents involved in this study commented Fee Free Basic Education (FFBE) to have more challenges in its implementation. These challenges are categorized into the following themes;

4.1.1 Overcrowding of Pupils in Classrooms

Findings from the current study revealed that the ratio of pupils per classroom in the selected primary schools is ranging from 80 and above. This proves the existence of over - crowdedness in primary school classrooms in GairoDistrict due to the introduction and implementation of the Fee Free Basic Education policy. This large class size was found to affect the teaching and learning process.

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In the interview session, one head teacher from school D pointed out:

The high enrolment rate due to the introduction of FFBE has brought about overcrowded classrooms. This leads to the failure of classrooms to accommodate the large number of pupils in the school (Head teacher Afrom school D)

The quote given by the respondent indicates that when school fees were abolished in government schools it was an advantage for poor families to have access to education. It seems that fee - free education became the open door to the massive number of students enrolled in primary schools which lead to the failure of student to perform well. Supporting this, the following statements were heard from teachers in school A during FGD:

The classrooms are not able to contain such a large number of pupils at once. The construction of many classrooms in our primary schools is a slow process that waits for grace from the government funds (FGD in school A)

These views presented by the respondents reveal that since the year 2015 to - date, the enrolment rate has been increasing in a drastic manner leading to large numbers of students inclassrooms. This is in line Wanjala, (2017) who also found that high enrolment rate of students has led to overcrowding in classrooms thus hindering effective teaching and learning process in classes and also resulting in some students having to sit on the floor or hence the learning environment is not conducive.

It also emerged from the study that, the drastic increases in enrolment in schools have led to many challenges to implementers including shortage of teaching and learning facilities, shortage of teachers, overcrowded classrooms, and increased teacher student's ratio which tends to threaten the quality of teaching and learning. The finding corroborates with the study by Nkurunziza et al (2012), that the elimination of direct costs of schooling in Sub - Saharan African countries has created a large surge in school enrolments.

The results concurred with the statement of Marwa (2019) who noted that the policy of fee free secondary education has led to increasingstudent's enrolment and students' dropout decreased

4.1.2 Shortage of Teaching and Learning Materials

The study found that the inadequacy of teaching and learning materials is one of the challenges which are associated with the introduction and implementation of FFBE policy in many governments primary schools in the Gairo district.

During the interview, One WEO from ward A articulated that:

The government introduced the FFBE policy too hurriedly; there was no enough preparation to carter for such a policy in terms of teaching and learning materials, teachers, and classrooms to support the high enrolment. This is the reason why pupils have to sit on the floor because of a shortage of chairs. This has resulted in poor examination results and performance of several pupils (WEO from ward A).

The finding by the respondent agrees with the sense that, a fee - free basic education policy was launched by the government of Tanzania to guarantee education attainment for all. Although it seems the preparation to afford its impact is considered to be not enough to the extent that the challenges seem to be rampart in many parts of our country.

The following statement were also reported from school C during a FGD andwere supported unanimously by the majority of the group members:

Fee - free basic education has negatively affected teaching and learning process due to insufficient teaching and learning materials. The number of pupils has increased tremendously while teaching and learning materials have not increased that much (FGD in school C - February, 2023)

The quotes given by the respondents expresses that, in the beginning, the implementation of fee free education was considered to be very difficult in public primary schools. There were a lot of complaints and it was assumed that no head teacher thought it would work. However, currently, there is a lot of improvement although there are still shortages such as a lack of teaching and learning materials such as books, papers, laboratory apparatuses, and insufficient chemicals (URT, 2016).

4.1.3 Teachers' Teaching Heavy Workload

The study found that, on one hand, the abolition of fees and other forms of contributions encouraged a lot of attendance of pupils to school because of minimal disturbance they encounter as it was before, but on the other hand, it has increased teacher's workload. Supporting this, the following statements were heard from one of one of the primary teachers during FGD:

Fee free education, has on one hand, brought blessing of increased enrolment. But on the other hand, it has led to teaching workload than ever (FGD in school A – February,

Findings from the current study revealed that teaching heavy workload to teachers is one of the major factors affecting the successfully implementation of a Fee - Free education policy.

In another interview session, one head teacher from school B pointed out that:

Our school does not have enough teachers; this makes it hard for teachers to teach large number of pupils being enrolled as a result of ff free education policy. This makes one teacher teach many sessions. Also, as head teacher have periods to teach despite the administrative tasks that I have. I do this to motivate my teachers so that they do not lose their interest in teaching (Head teacher B from school B)

A primary teacher from school D when interviewed opined to the same point adding that:

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There is a challenge of shortage of teachers in most of our primary and secondary schools. Fee free basic education policy means more pupils will be enrolled, the number that will not keep pace with the available number of teachers (Teacher A in school D)

However, it has led to overcrowded classrooms and increased teacher workload without increase of extra manpower. Implicitly, the quality of the teaching and learning processes and learning outcomes are most likely under threat. This finding correlates with Kapinga (2017) who found that the majority of the teachers had more than 32 periods and above per week due to a shortage of teachers in primary schools. The study also found that teacher - pupil ratio is not appropriate in many primary schools. This is contrary to the government guidelines which direct that the teacher - pupil ratio should be 1: 45, but this is not the case in primary schools in the Gairo district. In all primary schools that the researcher visited, for example, the teacher student ratio was 1: 80 or 1: 100. Furthermore, teachers have many periods to teacher ranging from 32 periods to 45 periods per week in some schools. Even though the government is trying to address the problem but it is still very difficult to approve it.

The findings under teaching based challenges corroborates with the capital theory of school effectiveness and improvement as helped to explain the relationship between the increase in enrolment rate in schools and how school leaders and teachers amend their teaching and management approach to handle large number of students, together with their behavior and learning outcome.

4.1.4. Declining Teaching - Learning Quality

The teachers, school committee chairpersons and head teachers reported that the fee - free basic education policy had brought substantive benefits and also had an impact on the teaching and learning process, although a good number of the participants feared that its implementation had somewhat compromised the quality of teaching and learning. For example, 55.3 percent of the heads of schools and 36.3 percent of the teachers agreed that the "Introduction of fee free basic education compromises the quality of education". Furthermore, 40 percent of the head teachers and 60 percent of teachers indicated that the fee - free basic education policy was likely to affect the academic performance of learners negatively. The majority of the participants further reported that the fee - free basic education policy had resulted in overcrowded classrooms. For instance, the teacher - pupil ratio (TPR) in Standard One stood at 1: 164 in 2016 compared to the average of a 1: 99 teacher - pupil ratio in 2015 in the primary schools visited.

Furthermore, the introduction of fee - free basic education was reported to have increased the teachers' workload, with only 10 percent of the teachers agreeing that this policy had improved teacher productivity and motivation. The teachers further stated that the implementation of the policy had translated into a surge in the number of pupils, a shortage of resources, and an increased workload for them, without any attendant positive outcomes for them as teachers. Although more children were enrolled in schools, the number of classrooms and teachers remained the same. In 2016 and

2017, for example, the pupil classroom ratio was 1: 77 and 1: 73, respectively, compared with the standard of 1: 45 at the national level. Similarly, one of the teachers lamented:

The fee - free education policy is good as it allows children from poor families to access primary education. It reduces the financial burden on poor families. The fee - free education benefits parents, but what does Ithas led to the decreased teaching - learning quality due to large number of pupils that a teacher is required to attend (Teachers from school A)

Similar findings were revealed from the Statistics and Logistics Officer (SLO) that the introduction of fee free education policy has led to declining teaching - learning quality. The SLO said:

With fee free education policy teachers are obliged to have large number of pupils to teach. This makes them (teachers) to have low morale and hence affect the quality of teaching (SLO, Gairo).

The documentary review also showed decline in the teaching - learning quality. It was revealed in the teacher's attendance register and annual examination results that there was poor attendance in the classroom, the annual examination results were seen to be poor compared to the performance of pupils before the introduction of fee free education policy.

The increase in enrolment has created quality problems in schools. Tanzania, however, is not unique in this respect. The findings are similar to the findings by World Bank, (2009) whereby in Malawi, for example, the pupil to classroom ratio increased to 119: 1, the pupil to teacher ratio increased to 62: 1, and the pupil to textbook ratio increased to 24: 1. This country experienced a severe shortage of classrooms, desks, instructional materials and teachers' housing, as well as insufficient numbers of teachers to cater for the school - age population.

4.1.5. Parental Withdrawal and Relinquishing Responsibility for their Children's Schooling

The findings further reveal that, previously, the parents had been contributing to their children's mid - day meals at school. In one primary school, for example, the parents were contributing up to Tshs 10, 000 for meals for each pupil per year. In some schools, the parents contributed maize and beans to be used for school meals. However, it was reported that, due to the fee - free policy's implementation, the parents in many schools had withdrawn their contribution for meals, believing that the government now funds for the supply of these items. Moreover, due to the implementation of the fee - free basic education policy, many parents were increasingly relinquishing responsibility for the education of their children. Their attendance at school meetings was falling. As one of the head teachers, for example, succinctly stated:

Free education has meant that parents have left the entire responsibility for the education of their children squarely on the government's shoulders. Recently, we convened a meeting of parents...to discuss how to improve the children's performance. Out of 28 parents, only three turned

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up for the meeting! In the past, most parents would have come (Head teacher, school A).

Similarly, another head teacher of school B stated that there were positive aspects of the previous policy that allowed parents easily to contribute viably to their children's education,

Another head teacher of school C commented,

In the past, parents used to come to school to ask how their children were progressing at school. With the implementation of fee - free education, the parents seem to feel that they have no responsibility at all for the education of their children. Hardly any parent comes to enquire about the progress of his or her children (Head teacher, school C).

The overall impression is that the parents' engagement with their children's schooling has declined due to a belief that the government's fee - free basic education was taking care of everything. This misconception threatens the parents - teachers/school accountability relationship, which could be detrimental to the quality delivery of education and, hence, the country's overall quality education provision in the long - run.

5. Conclusion

Based on the findings, it can be concluded that implementation of fee free education policy has both negative and positive impacts. The negative impacts hinder effective teaching and learning which is connected to the introduction of fee free basic education. These negative impacts include existence of over - crowdedness in classrooms, inadequacy of teaching and learning materials, and shortages or lack of teaching and learning materials

6. Recommendations

The study recommended that the government of Tanzania should give clear explanation of what fee free basic education is all about in order to make parents be willing to support schools through material and moral support.

The study also recommended that the government should rethink on the mode of providing fee free basic education by involving wider community in the decision - making process.

The study finally recommended that the amount of capitation grants be increased and disbursed to schools on time.

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