Utilization of Fiscal Resources in Fee-Free Education Policy: The Case of Selected Community Secondary Schools' Heads in Tarime Urban District

Lucas Chacha

The Open University of Tanzania Flora Kiwonde

The Open University of Tanzania flora.kiwonde@out.ac.tz

Abstract

This study investigated the capacity of heads of schools in utilizing the fiscal resources for implementing fee free education policy (FFEP) in community secondary schools. The study employed descriptive research design with a quantitative approach where stratified sampling technique was used to select a sample size of 190 respondents. Questionnaires were used to collect data and SPSS served as an analysis tool in interpreting the collected data. The findings revealed that heads of schools supervise and monitor the expenditure of school funds as per government directives and financial regulations although they do not provide accurate financial information of their schools. On the other hand, the study found that heads of schools do not properly keep records of staff in planning and allocation of fiscal resources related to implementing FFEP. The study concluded that although heads of schools do not delegate the mechanism of financial matters to capable staff, the prioritization of financial allocation according to the needs, helped successful implementation of the FFEP. The study recommends that heads of schools should keep records of staff properly in planning and allocation of fiscal resources for implementing FFEP. This goes together with the heads of schools giving accurate financial information of their schools and involving important stakeholders in decision making and matters concerning school budget.

Keywords: Fee-free education policy, fiscal resources, community secondary schools.

INTRODUCTION

Investing in education leads to faster growth of developed and newly industrialized countries (Adan & Orodho, 2015). Many Sub-Saharan Africa including Tanzania are now paying attention to investing in

education and improving primary, secondary, and tertiary levels. Both developed and developing countries consider primary and secondary as essential basic education and a right of every modern citizen (Ikediugwu, 2016). Investment and improvement in education is done in levels including primary, secondary as well as tertiary level (Opoku et al. 2020). Secondary education is an important part of the educational interventions as it is transiting the primary education to tertiary education. However, the main challenges in the level of secondary education in Tanzania and other sub Saharan Africa seem to be the academic performance particularly in community secondary schools.

The demand for secondary school education has been increasing due to the increase in the enrolment of pupils in primary schools. In Tanzania, for instance, primary school education increased enrolment from 59% in 2005 to around 90% in 2011 (Mbawala, 2017). This is because the government abolished all primary school fees, thus making the starting point of implementation of the Primary Education Development Plan (PEDP). These reforms aim to enhance both access to primary education and the quality of teaching. The PEDP was the latest major effort in this area which started in 2002. The PEDP aimed to deliver sustainable, basic education of high quality to all by making education affordable after abolishing school fees and all mandatory parental contributions for all the children. It also aimed to enhance enrolment and strived to improve education quality (Ndunguru, 2018). Despite the efforts made in 2001 only 4.5 million out of 7.5 million children in primary schools were enrolled (United Republic of Tanzania (URT), 2016).

The Secondary Education Development Plan (SEDP) was a ten-year plan that was carried out in two stages (2004-2009 and 2009/2010-2014). Higher enrolment numbers in primary schools created upward pressure for places in public secondary schools as part of the PEDP. SEDP, once again, put important policy pledges in the Vision 2025 and the National Strategy for Growth and Poverty Reduction (NSGRP), into action. The SEDP goals were to promote access, equity, quality, education management system improvement, management reforms, and the devolution of authority (Abdul, 2019). According to Ikediugwu (2016), the awareness of the relationship between education and the economic development of a country has influenced many countries to offer free primary and secondary education. Thus, many countries have decided to introduce various policies that provide free education to students.

In December 2015, upon taking office, the late President John Magufuli announced the government's decision to abolish all fees and additional financial requirements up to Form IV. The abolition of school fees is one of the most important action taken by the government to implement its ambitious education goals. The measure was preceded by the new 2014 Education and Training policy, which provides for 10 years of free and compulsory primary and lower-secondary education (URT, 2015a) that aimed to increase access to primary and secondary education and to improve the quality of education. These goals are in line with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), a United Nations initiative that sets a target for all countries to offer all children free, equitable, and quality primary and secondary education by 2030. The goals are also in line with Tanzania's international and regional human rights obligations to realize the right to primary and secondary education for all.

The trends show that education has been a national priority for successive Tanzanian government since independence and school heads are considered as of more important to the country's efforts to implement new reforms and plans at the school level. However, education reforms require heads of schools to do their work diligently and allocate their time and other resources in new ways and learn new skills (Manaseh, 2016). To that end, the government began to pay capitation grants (monthly funds) to public secondary school bank accounts with additional money to cover running costs per student enrolled as a move to reduce corruption in local governments. Previously funds were distributed through district councils in their jurisdictions. Analysis conducted by the policy forum shows that secondary schools only received TZS 12,000–15,000 instead of the TZS 25,000 required in capitation grants. The government also reportedly did not disburse funding to cover infrastructural costs (URT, 2016).

In response to FFEP, according to the secondary education development programme document, heads of secondary schools are responsible for supervising the teaching programme, ensuring high quality teaching and learning, effective use of time for the entire school day, and a conducive teaching and learning environment (Mbawala, 2017). In addition, heads of schools play a major role in preparing school development plans and budgets, managing the day-to-day activities in a school, and maintaining school records, such as financial, academic and discipline records (URT, 2016). In short, heads of schools are expected to supervise all academic,

administrative, and management issues in schools (Government Education Circular Number 3 of 2016).

However, the effectiveness of heads of schools in implementing FFEP in Tanzania has been questioned by various studies such as Mwakalukwa (2019), who challenged on how heads of schools implement the policy to cope with implementation challenges. In addition, Abdul (2019) challenged the implementation of 2014 education policy in attaining quality education in FFEP in Tanzania. Furthermore, Daniel (2020) argues that elimination of fees in schools, creates issues of sustainability, equity and equality. Investing in education contributes to human capital development, which fosters economic growth through increased productivity, and contribute to decreases in social disparity (Kamau et al., 2015).

Other studies such as Hallinger (2003) examined the capacity of the heads of schools to apply resources available in schools. The study found that most of the heads of schools in primary schools lacked the capability to utilize effectively the resources available in schools so as to implement FFEP in their schools. On the other hand, Godda (2018) conducted a study on the management capacity of heads of public secondary schools in the implementation of FFEP in Singida municipality. The study was descriptive research survey that employed both qualitative and quantitative research approaches. The findings indicated that heads of public secondary schools possessed managerial skills to run their schools effectively despite being faced with several challenges, like inadequate funds to cater for the schools' needs, a misconception by parents that the policy catered for all the fees, and a rapid increase in students' enrolment. The findings further revealed that school heads used informal and formal coping strategies like community participation and informal peer coaching to manage the challenges of FFEP.

In a study by Nigicser (2017), in Niger, the study attempted to focus on teachers' abilities in utilizing physical resources to implement FFEP. The study employed questionnaires as a tool of data collection. The study found that head teachers do not have enough ability to utilize resources available in schools to implement FFEP. Alam and Ahmad (2017) carried out a study based on the ability of heads of schools to implement gaps in educational policies in Pakistan. The study used secondary data as the documentary review. The study found that the absence of coherence

progressive government arrangements and the training of heads of schools to effectively implement education policy are the major challenges that face heads of schools in Pakistan. The study suggested that the government should provide education to heads of schools on how to effectively implement FFEP to provide quality education.

Victor (2017) analysed principals' managerial competencies for effective management of school resources in secondary schools in Anambra State. The study discovered that school principals have managerial competencies such as prioritizing financial allocation based on school needs, maintaining accurate financial information, ensuring accountability in all school expenditures, conducting periodic audits of school budgets, and implementing cost-cutting strategies for effective financial resource management, among other things.

Orodho (2014) evaluated East African policies on fee free primary and secondary education. The data reveals that access to primary and secondary education in the East African countries has increased dramatically. However, education in these countries has been met with virtually identical unique obstacles in providing education, resulting in significant regional and gender gaps in access to, and low quality of education.

Mohammedi et al. (2015), conducted a study to determine the challenges of implementing fee free secondary education in secondary schools in Mandera West Sub-County in Kenya. The policy was found to be falling short of its laudable goals of increasing access to and quality education. It was suggested that the Kenyan government, through the Ministry of Education, enhance capitation and speed up the fund transfer process to schools.

From the reviewed studies it has been revealed that most of the studies' focus was on other resources other than fiscal resources. This study specifically covered that knowledge gap by investigating the abilities of heads of schools in utilizing the fiscal resources for implementing FFEP particularly in community secondary schools. Furthermore, despite all the management and supervision inefficiencies reported in secondary schools in Tanzania, there are no clear strategies stipulated in the new education policy of 2014 to improve management and supervision of financial resources to enhance FFEP in secondary schools. The reviewed literatures

were useful to find out the studies conducted in the area of FFEP and to establish the reason of the current study. It is, therefore, in this context that the study had the major objective of investigating the capacity of heads of schools to utilize the fiscal resources for implementing FFEP in selected community secondary schools in Tarime district.

The study's theoretical foundations are built on a theory, namely the system theory that was established by Ludwig Von Bertalanffy (Von Bertalanffy, 1950). A system, according to Hall and Fagen (2017), is a collection of items or entities that interact to produce a whole. The system theory sees social organizations, such as schools, as systems made up of individuals who interact as they work together in different structures, depending on each other. This, system theory provides framework to understand the importance of different structures at the school level, such as the school committee/board, the heads of schools, teachers, and parents as well as at higher levels, such as the community, district, region and the nation in providing input on the school's management. This approach is based on the idea that organizations (schools) do not exist in a vacuum, but are reliant on their internal surroundings, such as teachers, students and parents; and external surroundings, such as the society or economic system to which it belongs (Von Bertalanffy, 1950). Different actors at different levels within and outside the school impact on heads of school decisions, thus, without the support from within and outside the school system, the capacity of the heads of schools to utilize resources becomes questionable.

METHODOLOGIES

Research Design, Sample, and Sampling Techniques

The study employed descriptive research design with a quantitative approach where stratified sampling technique was used to select a sample size of 190 respondents. The stratified sampling technique allowed the researcher to group the population into small groups called "strata" and then the sample size was selected from the small groups by using simple random sampling technique (Kothari, 2019). This method gave equal chance of all the members of the population to be included in the sample size. The researcher decided to use this method so as to provide equal chance to all teachers to be included in the study regardless of their gender.

Data Collection Methods

The study comprised of both primary and secondary data, whereby questionnaires were used as primary data collection tools and documentary review was used as a secondary data collection tool. The 190 questionnaires with Likert scale questions were administered straight to the teachers of the selected secondary schools. Likert Rating Scale was selected because it made possible to cover all aspects of the study. For all the sub-parts and sub-sections, the selected respondents were asked to put a tick ($\sqrt{ }$) response corresponding to their choices. The Likert scale instrument was employed by the researcher because it reduces bias and it helps to collect information in a very short time within a group of people (Etikan & Bala, 2017). The instrument makes easy and flexible interpretation of quantitative data where a range of opinions, behaviours and attitudes can be easily interpreted because Likert scale surveys provide a wider range of answer options. Data were coded, entered and analyzed through descriptive statistics which was also used to summarize the information collected in the study. Results were presented in tables and figures based on frequencies and percentages and in consideration with the major objective of this study.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Demographic Information of the Respondents

Table 1 presents the information of the study respondents.

Table 1: Demographic Information of the Respondents (N=190)

Variable	Frequency	Percentages (%)		
Gender				
Male	97	51		
Female	93	49		
Total	190	100		
Educational level				
Diploma	8	4		
Degree	171	90		
Masters	11	6		
Total	190	100		
Age				
Below 30 years	71	37		
30-40 years	83	44		
Above 40 years	36	19		
Total	190	100		

Source: Field Data (2021)

Table number 1 shows the number of respondents. Demographic data are potentially useful for providing attention to any features that might be linked to the substantive topic and therefore keeping a good record of the participants' relevant characteristics. It is crucial to know the characteristics of the respondents hence easy to ascertain if the sample is a representative of the population or not. The demographic data show that the selection included different genders, age groups and education level so in a way representative (Maslovskaya, 2019). The number of male respondents' participation in the study was 97 (51%) and female were 93 (49%). This implies that both males and females participated in the study. Also, the category of education level indicated that 171 (90%) of respondents had bachelor degree level, 8 (4%) of respondents had diploma level, and 11 (6%) of respondents had master's degree level. This implies that a large number of respondents with a degree level participated in the study.

Moreover, table 1 indicates respondents' age where 83 (44%) of respondents were between 30-40 years old, while 71 (37%) of respondents were below 30 years old and 36 (19%) of respondents were above 40 years old. This indicated that respondents with ages between 30-40 years old were more than other age groups of the respondents who participated in this study. The data implied that all age categories were represented in this study.

Capacity of Heads of Schools in Utilizing the Fiscal Resources

Table 2 indicates the summary of the findings as far as the objective of the study is concerned. The table summarizes the capacity of heads of schools in utilizing the fiscal resources for implementing FFEP using various selected aspects. The Likert scale was used to summarise the findings as it allows respondents to self-report the extent of their agreement or disagreement with given questions. The likert scale also enables easy and quicker data analysis.

Table 2: The Capacity of Heads of Schools in Utilizing the Fiscal Resources (N=190)

Statement	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Total
Heads of schools do not supervise and monitor the expenditure of school funds per government directives and financial regulation	17%	19%	-	37%	27%	100%
Head of schools do not prioritize financial allocation according to needs in schools	15.2%	16.3%	-	43.3%	25.2%	100%
Heads of schools do not ensure that school budgets reflect agreed goals and objectives	22%	48%	-	15%	15%	100%
Heads of schools do not delegate the mechanisms of financial matters to capable staff members	33.6%	34.7%	-	12.8%	18.9%	100%
Heads of schools do not keep financial records	11.8%	21.5%	-	31%	35.7%	100%
Heads of schools do not use the school budget for decision making	12%	18%	-	48%	22%	100%

Source: Field Data (2021)

The findings of aspect number one in table 2 indicate that the highest percent (37%) of the respondents disagreed while the lowest percent (17%) of the respondents strongly agreed that heads of schools do not supervise and monitor expenditure of school funds per government directives and financial regulations. These findings reveal that heads of schools supervise and monitor the expenditure of school funds per government directives and financial regulations.

Based on the findings, it is clear that it is not true that the heads of schools do not supervise and monitor the expenditure of school funds per government directives and financial regulations, but that they do supervise and monitor the expenditure of school funds per government directives and financial regulations. The possible reasons that enhance the school heads to supervise and monitor the funds properly are due to prior training that was conducted during the commencement of FFEP. The findings are different from those of Victor (2017), who showed that although management agencies perform well in certain areas, they face many challenges in monitoring and controlling budgets. The study found various challenges in budget preparation, execution, and budget control in the budget preparation process. Various challenges were identified that affect the budget control and control process including poor financial reporting, insufficient and weak public training for school administrators.

Moreover, studies such as Mkanga (2016) have shown that leadership power is crucial in schools' implementation of education reforms.

Furthermore, findings in table 2 show that the highest number of respondents (43.3%) disagreed, and the lowest number (15.2%) of respondents strongly agreed that heads of schools do not prioritize financial allocation according to needs. This shows that it is not true that heads of schools do not prioritize financial allocation according to needs. Therefore, the findings indicated that the notion that the heads of schools do not prioritize financial allocation according to needs is not true, but the fact is that the heads of schools prioritized all financial allocation according to needs within the school.

The findings imply that the decision on which budget to use and how to allocate depends on the method that best suits the school's circumstances. Different techniques are used in budgeting, and it's important to understand each technique in order to allow the school to choose the most appropriate budget method to prioritize financial allocation according to needs. These findings are supported by Victor (2017) who found out that school principals have managerial competencies in prioritizing financial allocation according to school needs, keeping accurate financial information of the school, ensuring accountability in all school expenditures, carrying out periodic auditing of school budgets and cost-saving strategies for effective financial resource management among others. However, the findings are different from the study by Nigicser (2017) in Niger, which attempted to focus on teachers' abilities to utilize financial resources and found that head teachers do not have enough ability in utilizing the resources available in schools to implement FFEP.

Moreover, the findings in table 2 show that the highest number of respondents which is 48% agreed, while 15% of the respondents (the lowest number) strongly disagreed that heads of schools do not ensure that school budgets reflect agreed goals and objectives. The possible reasons of the findings might be caused by various factors that face the heads of schools in secondary schools in Tarime district such as misuse of financial resources, insufficient financial planning skills, and poor budget allocation. A good budget can reduce the risk of financial crises. It can also save a lot of time and stress associated with sudden financial shortages. A good budget can also lead to better educational results while

giving schools more leeway to respond to curriculum changes and allocate resources where they are most needed. However, Aluko and Adan (2015) recognized that poor planning and limited enhancement of school heads' capacity to manage the programs negatively influenced the achievement of desired goals of fee free secondary education in Kenya. This incapacity limited the possible level of success of the program. The disharmony between the heads of schools and other school organs also has led to the haphazard and unsystematic implementation of school projects or utilization of the school funds sent by the FFEP for that matter.

On the other hand, findings in table 2 show 34.7% of the respondents agreed. 33.6% of the respondents strongly agreed, while 18.9% of the respondents strongly disagreed, and 12.8% of the respondents disagreed that heads of schools do not delegate the mechanism of financial matters to capable staff. These findings indicate that heads of schools do not delegate the mechanism of financial matters to capable staff. The findings imply that limited enhancement of other capable staff in managing the program negatively influenced the achievement of the desired goals of FFEP. This incapacity limited the possible level of successes of the program. The disharmony between the heads of schools and other school organ also has led to haphazard and unsystematic implementation of school projects or utilization of the school funds send for the implementation of the policy.

Also, the findings in table 2 show that 35.7% of the respondents disagreed, 31% of the respondents strongly disagreed, while 21.5% of the respondents agreed, and 11.8% of the respondents strongly agreed that heads of schools do not keep financial records. This indicates clearly that heads of schools do keep properly financial records. Additionally, the findings showed that majority of the respondents revealed that it is not true that heads of schools do not keep financial records, but the fact is that heads of schools tend to keep financial records properly. The findings are supported by Victor (2017), who analyzed principals' managerial competencies for effective management of school resources in secondary schools in Anambra State. The study found out that school principals' have managerial competencies in prioritizing financial allocation according to school needs, keeping accurate financial information about the school, ensuring accountability in all school expenditures, carrying

out periodic auditing of school budgets, and adopting cost-saving strategies for effective financial resource management, among others.

In addition, the findings in table 2 show that the highest number of respondents (48%) disagreed, while the lowest number (12%) of the respondents strongly agreed that the heads of school do not use the school budget for decision making purposes. The findings revealed that it is true that the heads of schools do not use schools' budgets for decision-making because majority of the respondents indicated that the heads of schools do not use schools' budgets for decision-making. This implies that heads of schools have the capability of planning and allocating financial resources for implementing FFEP in Tarime Urban District. The ability to plan and allocate financial resources is very crucial as, since ancient times, the budget has been a very important and useful part of the management strategy for educational institutions. Controlling the financial behaviour of school system officials is essential. The budget can prevent the funds provided for various educational services from being wasted or spent recklessly. The reason is that budget operators are obliged to use appropriate discretion when spending money.

These findings are different from those of Hallinger (2003), who found that most of the heads of schools in primary level education lack the capability to utilize effectively the resources available in schools so as to implement FFEP in primary schools. However, the findings are supported by Penlington et al. (2018) who found that headteachers did not act alone to ensure the school was successful, but they played a great role in involving other stakeholders to ensure a school was achieving its goal.

CONCLUSION

Based on the findings, the study concludes that various related literatures have shown similar and or different findings as compared to this study. This study for instance has found that the heads of schools do supervise and monitor the expenditure of school funds as per government directives and financial regulations. This is contrary to other studies that was conducted before which indicated that heads of schools do not supervise and monitor the expenditure of school funds as per government directives and financial regulations. In addition, the study found that heads of schools do not have the capacity to utilize resources for the successful implementation of FFEP in community secondary schools. Therefore, this study concludes that heads of schools are supposed to give true financial

information about their schools as well as to keep records of staff properly and accurately in planning and allocation of funds for implementing FFEP. The study further concludes that the prioritization of financial allocation according to needs in some of the secondary schools in Tarime Urban District helped successful implementation of FFEP in the community secondary schools.

RECOMMENDATIONS

First, the study recommends that heads of schools should ensure that the school budgets reflect agreed goals and objectives as per plans for successful implementation of FFEP in community secondary schools in Tanzania.

Second, the study recommends that heads of schools need to delegate the mechanism of financial matters to capable staff. This goes together with the head of schools to give accurate financial information about their schools.

Third, this study recommends that heads of schools should keep records of staff properly and accurately in planning and allocation of fiscal resources for implementing FFEP and should also involve staff in decision-making and matters concerning school budget.

Fourth, the study recommends that government and educational stakeholders should allocate adequate budget to be released to community secondary schools for smooth implementation of FFEP in schools.

The study further recommends other studies to be conducted in the area of FFEP considering the aspects that have not been taken on board in other studies.

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