

*Full Length Research Paper*

# Management challenges facing implementation of free primary education in Kenya: A case of Keiyo District

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In January 2003 the Kenyan Government declared Free Primary Education (FPE) in all public schools as a fulfillment of the Education for All (EFA). This study examined the management challenges facing implementation of FPE in Kenya, a case of primary schools in Keiyo District. This was a descriptive survey study where questionnaires, interview schedule and observation were used to collect data from the head teachers, teachers and Education Officers from Keiyo District. Purposive sampling technique was used to select the education officers and the head teachers while random sampling technique was used to select the zones, schools and the teachers that participated in the study. 260 respondents participated in the study. Data collected were analyzed using descriptive statistic; percentages and frequencies. The study showed that primary school management face challenges in the implementation of the program which include shortage of staff, limited financial management skills, resistance from parents, inadequate physical facilities and delay in disbursement of funds by the government. Head teachers require further training in financial management and other managerial skills; and accounts clerks should be employed in primary schools to assist in book-keeping.

**Key words:** Free primary education, management challenges, implementation, education in Kenya

## INTRODUCTION

At independence, Kenya inherited an education system that was characterized by racial segregation and different types of curricula for the various races namely Europeans, Asians, Arabs and Africans. The colonial schools had a different curriculum from that of the African independent and the missionary schools. According to Bogonko (1992) "before 1960, free and universal primary education had not been extended to African children in any of the East African British colonies, racial discrimination in primary and secondary education was still intact" The expansion of primary education remained a crucial problem in the colonial era. The situation did not radically change with the achievement of independence in 1963. Sifuna (1980) reports that, the achievement of independence heightened pressure to increase the school population and a rapid move towards universal primary education. The purpose of education was political, social, cultural, humanistic and economic. It was

expected that the education would mould a whole individual who will contribute profitably to society.

The first step towards free primary education was in 1971 (Bogonko, 1992a); this was when President Jomo Kenyatta abrogated tuition fees for the economically marginal districts in the country. By July 1973 districts such as Marsabit, Mandera, West-pokot, Wajir, Tana River, Turkana, Samburu, Garissa and Lamu had free primary education. The government also built and supported boarding schools in these areas. A national feeding programme was also launched in these areas. The main idea here was to encourage more parents to retain their children in school. In 1973 another presidential decree made education free for the first four years of primary education throughout the country. Sifuna (1980) observes that the presidential decree was one of the most dramatic political pronouncements since it took the planners and the public unaware. The immediate result was increase in enrollments in primary schools from 1.8 million in 1973 to 2.8 million in January 1974. The Ministry of Education had to rethink of its priorities and operations in order to cope with the staggering rise of

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pupil enrollment. In 1976 the Gachathi Report recommended an extension of the waiver of fees to the full seven years of primary education by 1980. Despite the existence of free primary education by 1980, the schools witnessed many challenges that eventually contributed to its failure and the introduction of levies in primary schools. It was not until 2003 that the idea of free primary education was reintroduced in Kenya.

The introduction of free primary education in 2003 was received with mixed reactions across the country. The government's task force reported that the implementation of the program was faced with a number of glaring challenges that required to be addressed. In an attempt to implement the free education policy the head teachers found themselves in conflict with the parents, Education officials, and the sponsors. The program also faced some resistance; people are usually driven by fear of unknown and uncertainty of the effects of change hence some want to cling to that which they know best and what they believe to be good. Managers have to determine the actual causes of resistance to change and remain flexible enough in their approach to overcome them in an appropriate manner. There is a considerable degree of interaction between interdependent elements in any organization and this has to be recognized. As Koontz (2001) puts it 'the structure of the organization, the technology which is applied and the people working in it are highly interdependent and all the three have to be involved in the change process'.

An effective and efficient manager must possess the technical, human and conceptual skills in order to be a good organizer. Technical knowledge and skill include understanding and being proficient in using specific activity such as a process, technique, or procedure. The school managers should be equipped with relevant knowledge and skill to perform administrative duties which include planning daily routine, among other duties. This implies that school managers need to be trained to equip them with the relevant skills and techniques to prepare them to be effective in implementation of educational policies. A school manager, who accepts that people are the key to successful implementation of policies and changes, is cognizant of the barriers that people place between themselves and the changes required (Franklin, 2002).

The implementation of free primary education in Kenya however, found school managers off guard; they had not been prepared for the change and so they found it challenging. Many schools had an overwhelming increase in enrollment while others witnessed mass exodus. Average class sizes rose from 40 to 70 while the facilities remained the same. Mutua et al. (1992) noted that in Kenya today, approximately 50% of all the country's primary schools are housed in temporary and/or semi-permanent buildings; others are on split sites. The declaration of free primary education witnessed the rise in student enrollment which in turn led to strain in the

existing physical resources.

These changes required changes in the managerial skills of school managers. Orora (1997) points out that a change agent is a person who attempts to influence proposed change and its adoption as well as decisions in a direction which beneficiaries have indicated desirable. An advisory committee on supply and education of teachers observed that education service has been operating in a climate of rapid change and that this climate is likely to continue to the foreseeable future (Glatter 1988). Such a rapid change requires a continuous process of adjustment on the part of all those involved in the education system. This view is supported by Wideen (1987) who pointed out that teachers need continued professional growth and development in order to be competent to handle changes. School managers are judged with the responsibility of interpreting educational policies to the parents and other stakeholders; they are also responsible for obtaining, directing and utilizing resources available for successful implementation of education policies and programs. This study was designed to explore management challenges facing implementation of FPE in Kenya, a case of Keiyo District.

## THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The study was based on two theories namely the human capital theory and the systems theory. The human capital theory was formulated by Adam Smith. Slavin (1996) defines human capital as "the acquired skills of an individual education, training, and work habits." Human capital theory is the most influential economic theory of western education, setting the framework of government policies since the early 1960's. It is seen increasingly as a key determinant of economic performance.

The system theory was developed by biologist Ludwig Von Bertalanffy. LittleJohn (1983) defines a system as a set of objects or entities that interrelate with one another to form a whole. Systems theory is basically concerned with problems of relationships, of structures, and of interdependence, rather than with the constant attributes of object. The systems theory views an organization as a social system consisting of individuals who cooperate within a formal framework, drawing resources, people, finance from their environment and putting back into that environment the products they produce or the services they offer. This theory is based on the view that managers should focus on the role played by each part of an organization; rather than dealing separately with the parts (Hannagan, 2002).

Human capital theory influence government's commitment to invest in education through establishment of learning institutions at all levels and financing of education. After the attainment of independence in 1963; the Kenya government lacked the personnel needed to replace the Europeans in the civil service and other

sectors of the government. The government therefore undertook to provide education as a way of creating a pool of human resource to promote economic growth. The setting up of education commissions and prioritizing education needs in the subsequent development plans; proves the government's effort to invest in her people. The declaration of Free Primary Education (FPE) in 2003 is a milestone in Kenya government's effort to invest in human capital.

The systems theory maintains that an organization (school) does not exist in a vacuum. It does not only depend on its environment but it is also part of a larger system such as the society or the economic system to which it belongs.

The systems approach is concerned with both interpersonal and group behavioral aspects leading to a system of cooperation (Koontz, 2001). Plomp and Pelgrum (1993) noted that an educational system is a complex system comprising of subsystems at different levels; these are macro (state), meso (school) and micro (classroom and the student) levels. At each of these levels, educational decisions are influenced by different actors, for example, at the school level the school committee, the head teacher, teachers, and parents make certain decisions and give opinions on the management of the school.

The system theory emphasizes unity and integrity of the organization and focuses on the interaction between its component parts and the interactions with the environment. It suggests that organizations must be studied as a whole taking into consideration the interrelationships among its parts and its relationship with the external environment. Schools are open systems hence they respond to the external influences as they attempt to achieve its objectives. The implementation of the free primary education is an example of a change from the outer environment

## METHODOLOGY

### Research design

This study employed descriptive survey research. The target population comprised the primary school head teachers, teachers and education officers who are involved in management of schools in Keiyo District. Education officers selected included District Education Officers (D.E.O), Quality Assurance and Standards Officers (Q.U.A.S.O), the Area Educational Officers (A.E.O), Teachers Advisory Centre (T.A.C) tutors.

### Sampling techniques and sample size

The study employed purposive sampling technique to select the D.E.O, A.E.O, TAC-tutors, Q.U.A.S.O as well as the Head teachers who participated in the study. In the selection of zones, schools and teachers, the study adopted random sampling technique. Six zones Out of 13 and 83 public primary schools out of 166 in Keiyo District were selected for this study. A total number of 260 respondents were involved in the study.

### Methods of data collection

The study used questionnaires, interviews and observation in data collection. Questionnaires were designed to obtain details on views, problems and challenges facing Free Primary Education (FPE) program. Interviews were used to collect data from the Education officers, and inspectors to enrich information provided in the questionnaires. Interviews were used to collect administrative details, problems experienced, views of education officers on FPE and suggestions for improvement. Observation was developed to gather information on facilities available in schools.

### Data analysis and results

The study sought to explore the challenges facing primary school management since the implementation of FPE. This objective was achieved by exploring the effectiveness of education officers in supervising schools; exploring whether there were management problems in schools and identifying the problems associated with FPE. The findings on these issues are presented below.

### Supervision of schools by education officers

Education Officers in Kenya are judged with the responsibility of supervising education policies and programs in schools. Effective supervision of school programs by education ensures that they are efficiently and effectively implemented to achieve desired goals. In order to determine the effectiveness of Education Officers in supervision of FPE, the frequency of their visit to schools, their roles, purpose of visit to schools and frequency of the consultation with the head teachers were explored. Responses are shown in Table 1. The results in Table 1 above showed that 21.4% of the education officers visit schools to facilitate head teachers; 21.4% visit to educate while the rest 57.1% visit to supervise programs and policies. The study also showed that majority of the education officers (61.5%) visit schools once a term while the rest(38.5%) noted that their visits were on yearly basis. The purpose of these visits was mostly routine (62.2%) and to some extent advisory (30.8%). 64.3% of education officers indicated that they are consulted by head teachers while 35.7% reported that they are never consulted.

### Management problems in schools associated with FPE

To find out whether there were any management problems in schools associated with implementation of FPE; the experiences of the education officers, teachers and head teachers on the issue were explored. The responses are shown in Table 2.

From the results in Table 2; 76.5% of the teachers reported that there were management problems while 23.5% reported that there were none. Among the head teachers, 85.0% noted that there were problems against 15% who declined that there were none. This same trend is reflected among the education officers where 85.7% reported that there were problems while only 14.3% said there were none. In response to whether the problems were due to FPE, 44.0% teachers, 73.8% head teachers and 64.3% education officers responded in the positive. This implies that some of the problems facing schools existed were only exacerbated by the introduction of FPE.

To find out the nature of problems experienced by school management which are associated with implementation of FPE, the views of education officers, teachers and head teachers were sought. Summary of their responses are shown in Table 3.

The results in Table 3 showed that 70% of the head teachers indicated that they have inadequate physical facilities in their

**Table 1.** Issues on supervision of FPE by education officers.

Issues		Education officers		Head teachers	
		Frequency	%	Frequency	%
Frequency of visit to schools	Monthly	0	0.0	0	0.0
	Termly	8	61.5	0	0.0
	Yearly	5	38.5	0	0.0
Role of education officers	Educate	3	21.4	0	0.0
	Facilitate	3	21.4	0	0.0
	supervise	8	57.1	0	0.0
Purpose of visits to school	Advisory	5	35.7	0	0.0
	Routine	8	57.1	0	0.0
	investigative	1	7.1	0	0.0
Consultations with school management	Yes	9	64.3	80	100
	No	5	35.7	0	0.0
	No opinion	0	0.0	0	0.0

**Table 2.** Responses on existence of problems in schools

Problems		YES		NO	
		Frequency	%	Frequency	%
Are there management problems?	Head teachers	68	85	12	15
	Teachers	127	76.5	39	23.5
	Education officers	12	85.7	2	14.3
Are the problems due to FPE?	Head teachers	59	73.8	21	26.3
	Teachers	73	44.0	93	56.0
	Education officers	9	64.3	5	35.7

**Table 3.** Problems facing schools management.

Problems	Education officers		Head teachers		Teachers	
	Frequency	%	Frequency	%	Frequency	%
Inadequate physical facilities	10	71.4	70	87.5	147	88.6
Inadequate finances	5	35.7	68	85.0	123	74.1
Delay in disbursement of funds	7	50.0	76	95.0	144	86.1
Conflicts with parents	12	85.7	74	92.5	139	83.7
Difficulty in financial management	9	64.2	59	73.7	66	39.8
Indiscipline among pupils	2	14.3	43	53.8	151	91.0
Shortage of teachers and support staff	9	64.2	72	90.0	139	83.7
Lack of transport	13	92.9	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0

schools. Most of the schools lacked enough classrooms, toilets, and desks; possibly this was occasioned by the increase in enrollment. The rampant Conflicts in most of the schools as reported by the majority of the head teachers (92.5 %) was probably due to the misconceived understanding of "free education"; parents were not willing to support government efforts.

The parents perceived the provision of education as the governments' responsibility and they have no role to play anymore. The greatest challenge among education officers' (92.9%) relates to unavailability of transport. Amongst the teachers, majority (91.0%) noted that the greatest challenge is the escalating indiscipline among the pupils occasioned by the high influx of pupils.

## DISCUSSION OF THE FINDINGS

The findings showed that school managers were not prepared for the challenges associated with the FPE. Even though Education officers reported visiting schools to advise and educate teachers and school management on implementation of FPE; the findings of the study suggests that the school management was not adequately prepared to manage the profound changes. As change agent, the school management should direct proposed changes, adoption and decisions in a way desirable to the beneficiaries (Orora, 1997). Majority of the teachers, head teachers and education officers pointed out that there are management problems in schools. Some of the managerial problems existed before, but were exacerbated with the introduction of FPE.

Head teachers identified delay in releasing of funds by the government as a major challenge; this makes it very difficult for them to project and plan ahead. Saleemi (1997) noted that management requires accurate forecasts about the availability of the present physical resources for the accomplishment of its objectives. This situation differs from the case of FPE in Uganda, where the government does not provide funds directly but instead established an Instructional Materials Unit (IMU) whose role is to supply materials needed in the schools. Another challenge noted by head teachers is Conflicts with parents. This could have been precipitated by Parents' resistance to any attempts to have them supplement the governments' effort in funding of the primary schools. This resistance is probably due to the misconception that education is "free"; hence the government has the entire responsibility of funding it. These conflicts together with suspicion of misappropriation of the free education funds have led to the frequent transfer of head teachers.

Most of the schools have shortage of both teaching and non-teaching staff. This experience was first noted when the government introduced FPE in 1974 resulting in the government increasing the number of teachers training colleges and employing many untrained teachers putting a strain in the government expenditure in terms of salaries (Bogonko, 1992a). Before the implementation of FPE the number of teachers was barely enough; but the situation has been aggravated by the enlarged classes. The shortage of teachers has been worsened by the HIV/Aids pandemic and retirement. It is important that government addresses the issue on staffing if the FPE program is to succeed.

The surge of pupils in schools has strained the limited physical facilities in schools. Mutua et al. (1992) reports that, in Kenya today, approximately 50% of all the country's primary schools are housed in temporary and/or semi-permanent buildings; others are on split sites. Average class sizes rose from 40 to 70 while the facilities remained the same. In the rural areas most schools lack basic amenities like toilets and running water. Initially the

parents through the committees oversaw the provision of the facilities required in the schools such as desks, learning materials, classrooms and the staff houses. The rationale behind educational planning and good management here is to ensure the meager resources are properly utilized. With the declaration of free primary education, the school managers are finding it hard to convince parents to fund essential amenities that cannot be provided by the government.

A higher percentage of the head teachers (73.7%) reported facing challenges on financial management, and especially in book keeping. This is probably because most of the head teachers have not trained on financial management and worse still they were not inducted on introduction of FPE. Teachers on the other hand pointed out that deterioration of discipline among the pupils occasioned by the influx of pupils as a major challenge; this is especially an issue considering the fact that most of the schools are understaffed and handling many pupils therefore is a monumental task. Education officers cited lack of transport as a major problem hampering them from undertaking their supervisory duties effectively; this is probably because there are few vehicles available and they operate under a stringent budget. Generally however, it can be concluded that the FPE was hastily implemented hence there was no time to prepare the school management as well as education officers for the challenges associated with FPE. These challenges need to be addressed if the government noble idea is to succeed.

## CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS OF THE STUDY

The study established that although the head teacher is the chief accounting officer in the school, they face a lot of difficulties in financial management despite their best efforts to be transparent and accountable on the use of school funds. It is therefore imperative that the school management is trained on financial management to minimize these problems. The government and/or the parents should also employ accounts clerks in Primary schools to assist the head teachers in book keeping. The government should also avail funds to Schools at the beginning of the year to enable school managers to plan a head. Further sensitization of the public on FPE should also be carried out to sure more support from the parents and other stakeholders. Government should also consider increasing the funds meant for the co-curricular activities.

A system should also be established where incase of misappropriation of funds in the school, all the members of the management committees will be held accountable instead of punishing the head teacher alone. In the recent past (2009) some of the development partners have withheld the funds for free primary education citing high level corruption and misappropriation by the Ministry of

Education Officials. Despite calls for those implicated to resign, nothing has been done. This situation however threatens to stall the achievements gained in the past and presents challenge of access to basic education among the poor.

Schools heads should also ensure that their School Management Committees (SMC) and Parents Associations (PA) are actively involved in defining the schools annual spending priorities and procurement plans. Community involvement is considered to be central to the success of decentralized procurement policies, which form part of the community empowerment process. This will reduce the conflicts often witnessed between parents and the head teachers.

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