

Secondary schools in a county in Kenya seem to be taking advantages of the cost sharing policy: Understanding its practice and implications

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Abstract

The study set out to research on parents' views regarding the practice of cost sharing policy in secondary schools in Kenya in relation to form one entry items requirement and fee payment. This article reports on its findings. The study adopted a quantitative survey and employed a questionnaire (both closed and open-ended) to collect data. The study involved 150 participants with a response rate of 83.3%. The data obtained was analysed using the Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) resulting in descriptive data. The results reveal that: the items required by schools have grown over the years (90 per cent, n=150); the items requirement are putting enormous pressure on the parents (96 per cent, n=150); the items requirements are negatively affecting children's access to certain schools (94 per cent, n=150); and as a result many parents were forced to send their children to poor local harambee secondary schools (96 per cent, n=150) because they could not afford despite the fact that the children scored highly (obtained higher marks). Conclusion: long list of items required in relation to form one entry and their correspondingly high cost or prices are limiting students' ability to access certain schools despite the fact that they have the required entry marks.

Keywords: secondary schools, county, Kenya, cost sharing policy, parents, perspectives, advantages

Introduction

Based on the literature reviewed, cost sharing policy is a worldwide phenomenon affecting both developed and developing countries. In developing countries it affects all levels of education, while in developed countries the policy affects mainly higher education institutions (HEI) (Johnstone, et al., 2008). Not all are happy with the idea of cost sharing in educational institutions. Therefore a kind of dichotomy exists between those who support and those who are opposed to the idea. The two opposing groups are based on a number of assumptions. For instance, advocates of cost sharing policy stress the positive effects of fees, arguing that it increases efficiency, quality and brings extra revenue which could be used to subsidise students from under-represented groups and thus help improve access (Jongbloed, 2008). Besides, "tuition fees are also expected to work as an incentive for the students to behave efficiently, inducing them to make more conscious choices" (Jongbloed, 2008: 10). Further, fees as sources of revenue for educational institutions may increase the range of choices and the capacity in education system (Jongbloed, 2008: 12). Jongbloed (2008: 12) also reports that there is an important economic argument linked to cost sharing:

> … it can be argued that if users of higher education are requested to pay directly a part of the cost of their instruction, higher education will work more efficiently. On the other hand, users paying a higher amount will tend to be more demanding of institutions and the quality of the services provided. This in turn, will make the institutions more aware of the need to improve their efficiency in the use of their resources.

Besides, many in favour of the introduction of tuition fees expect them to solve all of higher education's financial problems (Johnstone, et al., 2008). Those opposed to cost sharing through fee payment assume that fees imposes an access barrier and will lead to decline in students numbers (Johnstone, et al., 2008). Glennerster et al., (20110 support this view identifying school fees as a barrier to education. It is important to clarify here that fees payment is just an aspect of cost sharing. Other aspects are discussed later on in the article.

One of the major arguments for cost sharing is fiscal stress- inability of domestic revenues to support education system making it necessary to raise contributions from non-government sources (i.e. outside the tax system) in order to increase the total level of expenditure (Penrose, 1998). The assumption is that through cost sharing, additional learning resources such as books, among others are made available to educational system. Besides, it is also assumed that cost sharing stimulates qualitative improvement (Penrose, 1998). However, evidence in the literature reveal that resources gained through fees derived income are not always invested in ways that would be expected to perceptibly improve the student experience (European Union, 2014) and as a result there is the tendency for students- staff ratios to rise, even when institutional income per-student was rising. Canada has been highlighted as one extreme example, where student-teacher ratios rose detrimentally by 20% even as per student income rose by 40% (European Union, 2014: 10). Therefore, the European Union (2014) makes a further observation that, while it may be true that fees make institutions better off, they do not necessarily make for a better student experience even when per student income is rising (P.10). This is due to three main reasons (European Union, 2014:10):

- In some cases, new funds are dedicated to expansion rather than improvements in quality. Thus new money is devoted to giving the same experience to more people rather than a better experience for the same number of people.
- Cost- inflation for academic staff, which increases the costs per student and thus contributes significantly to the phenomenon of extra funds not buying perceptible improvements.
- In some countries expenditure has increased on non-institutional activities. This is particularly true in Canada and England. Thus expenditure may be for administration or management tasks as well as research.

In Kenya cost sharing was introduced in 1988 (Wambugu and Mokoena, 2013) through the implementation of structural adjustment policy. However, a review of literature reveal existence of a partnership between the state, household and community long before the introduction of the cost sharing policy by the government of Kenya (Njeru and Orodho, 2003). This article reports on the findings of parents' views regarding the practice of cost sharing in a county in Kenya. In Kenya, following successful performance of Kenya Certificate of Primary Examination, pupils are selected to any of the following category of public secondary schools: National school, Extra-County school, County and District school.

Literature review

Meaning and perspectives of cost sharing

Based on the following definitions and explanations, cost sharing policy is more than just fees payment. Cost sharing is a term which combines the concepts of direct cost recovery, and education pricing policies, and indirect contributions from pupils, their parents and sponsors, which may be voluntary, quasi-compulsory or even compulsory. The term cost sharing encompasses privately as well as publicly provided sources (Penrose, 1998). To some cost sharing is a term which has most significance in specific contexts, such as textbooks procurement or school building and in various ways linked to concepts of community participation (Penrose, 1998).

Cost sharing is defined as "… a shift in the burden of higher education costs from being borne exclusively or predominantly by government or taxpayers, to being shared with parents and students" (Johnstone, 2003: 351). Further, Johnstone (2003, 2004) identifies various forms of cost sharing in higher education adopted by various countries, which includes:

- Introduction of tuition fees where public higher education was formerly free;
- Sharp increase in tuition fees where public higher education tuition has already existed;
- The imposition of user charges to recover the expenses of formerly subsidised food and accommodation;
- The diminution of student grants and scholarships;
- An increase in the effective recovery of students loans
- The official encouragement of tuition-dependent private higher education.

Cost sharing cam also be defined as an arrangement whereby the costs of the programme or project are shared by the involved parties according to an agreed upon formula (Wambugu, 2012) as cited in Wambugu and Mokoena (2013). Kiveu and Mayio (2009) define cost sharing as a situation where government, on one the hand, and households and community on the other hand share the responsibility of financing education.

Cost sharing can also involve a reduction of or even a freezing of students grants or students loan subsidies (reduction in student aid also constitute an increase in the private funding necessary to cover educational and living costs) but also public policies that encourage enrolment shifts from a heavily subsidised public sector to a much less subsidised fee-dependant private sector (European Union, 2014). It also involves student net-costs i.e. total costs borne by a student after consideration of tuition fees and compensatory study aid (European Union, 2014). Also in countries without tuition fees there is still a substantial amount of cost-sharing because no higher education system covers students' educational and living costs fully (European Union, 2014).

Structural adjustment programme and cost sharing policy

The socio-economic crises of the early 1980s led to the introduction of user fees in the social sector as part of the structural adjustment programme (SAP) (Owino and Abagi, 2000). The underlying objective of SAP was to mobilise additional resources. Rono (2002) describes the period 1980- 1990 as 'lost decade' because it was marked with severe external and internal difficulties. The difficulties and hardships that Kenya's economy experienced was attributed to the world recession associated with economic crisis of the 1970s (Rono, 2002). The key characteristics of the situation at the time was marked with: fluctuating prices of the country's major exports, low levels of technology, drought, famine, high population growth, the collapse of the East African Community, high rates of urbanisation, increasing debt, land fragmentations, widespread poverty, disease and ignorance (Rono, 2002). The situation negatively affected the country's economy; the gross domestic product (GDP) per capita fell significantly, followed by food shortages and declining standards of living (Rono, 2002). Kenya responded to the deteriorating economic situation through the implementation of the structural Adjustment programme. The SAPs in Kenya was initiated and supported by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and The World Bank (Rono, 2002; Mwinzi, 2002) and received her first loans from the World Bank in 1980.

The adoption of SAPs was aimed at restoring the efficiency in all sectors of the economy and consequently raising the rate of the economic growth (Rono, 2002). However, the SAPs had serious impact on the health and education sector, among others, as a result of the following adjustment measures: devaluation of the Kenya shilling, cuts in public spending, high taxation on mass consumption goods, removal of subsidy on basic foodstuffs and other basic needs removal of price controls and improvement in public sector planning and execution. Devaluation of the shilling increased the domestic prices of imported goods such as drugs and medical equipment, increased the cost of health inputs e.g. clean and safe water and led to infections. Removal of subsidies reduces access to food thus exacerbating malnutrition and poor housing. The positive effects of cuts in public spending, taxation of mass consumption goods and removal of subsidies is that they tend to reduce government debt and to lower inflation, resulting in increase in the purchasing power of the population, release resources for development expenditure and capital formation for further economic growth, thereby potentially saving or generating more government revenue for increased expenditure on health and education. Therefore a kind of cycle is created here.

According to Fischer (1989) as cited in Rono (2002) structural adjustment programmes consists of a set of economic policies designed to generate rapid and sustainable economic growth with macroeconomic stability. The SAPs is based on economic model of private ownership, competitive markets and an outward-oriented development strategy (Rono, 2002: 83). Although Ghana formally adopted a World Bank and IMF supported in 1986 evidence suggest that it had launched an economic recovery programme much earlier in 1983 which was considered a forerunner of the SAP. By 1986 a majority of African countries had adopted structural or financial recovery programmes with or without the support of the IMF and World Bank. The SAPs was aimed at institutional reform, including enterprises and parastatals. However for some countries the reform could not be sustained due to institutional and political constraints, high social costs and inadequate financing. For instance, in 1986 Zambia found the SAPs conditions too harsh and the government broke with IMF and The World Bank agreement. As a result, the IMF and the World Bank stopped funds to Zambia. Similarly, in Sierra Leone the SAPs failed due to overly ambitious objectives, administrative weaknesses and unbearable social costs. The programme was abandoned in 1988, after the president had declared a state of economic emergency.

The practice of cost sharing and its impact on the provision of education

Prior to the implementation of cost sharing in Kenyan universities, the government was responsible for full fees payment for all university students. Also government loans were automatically accessible to all university students. In other words the state subsidised university education. That practice ceased during 1991/92 academic year following the implementation of the cost sharing policy (Mwinzi, 2002). Besides, students were to pay directly for their meals, accommodation, stationaries and other personal needs (Mwinzi, 2002). In 1995 the government established Higher Education Loan Board (HELB) to assist students in difficulty circumstances. The main objective of HELB was to provide financial assistance to students who could not afford university education subsequent to the implementation of cost sharing policy (Mwinzi, 2002). However, evidence suggests that the board may not be in a position to provide adequate loans to the growing, qualified and deserving students due to financial and administrative difficulties (Mwinzi, 2002).

Cost sharing in primary education in Kenya was implemented in 1989 and scraped in December, 2002 (Onsomu, et al., 2004; Republic of Kenya, 1988) following the introduction of free primary education by the NARC government. The cost sharing policy reflected the partnership between the government, private entrepreneurs, NGOs, parents and other stakeholders in financing education (Onsomu et al., 2004; Onsomu et al., 2006). Within this policy framework the government pays expenses for general administration and planning of schools' inspection and curriculum development. Parents and communities on the other hand meet the capital costs and some recurrent costs including construction of schools, provision of physical infrastructure, teaching- learning resources, school equipment, school uniforms, and remuneration for non-teaching staff, security and transport among other indirect costs (Onsomu et al. 2004). Despite the implementation of free primary education in 2003, and subsided secondary education in 2008, parents and the community still continue to provide indirect costs to education for their children. For instance, Ishengoma (2004) reports that out of pocket cost e.g. uniform costs, among other items still continue to impede education access. Due to cost sharing, a majority of children who perform very well are unable to move to the next level especially from primary to secondary school (Alari, et al., 2013). Ayodo and Too (2013) observe that affordable secondary education remains elusive three years after the government introduced subsidised learning. It is interesting to note that many schools both public boarding and day have ignored government directives, for instance, that students in public day school learn free but schools charge fee and other numerous levies (Ayodo and Too, 2013).

Method

The study reported in this article was conducted to increase knowledge and understanding about the effect of cost sharing policy on students joining form one in secondary schools in a County in Kenya. The findings will contribute to building a knowledge base for understanding of the issues, and challenges linked to cost sharing policy. The study adopted a quantitative research design and employed questionnaire survey to collect data. The questionnaire format consisted of closed, open-ended and rating scale. This was necessary to diversify responses as well as reduce what Watson and Coombes (2009) as cited in Onderi and Makori (2014) call 'question fatigue'. The open-ended sections of the questionnaire offered respondents opportunity to make a comment, expand or clarify some information on their responses and thus help researchers and readers gain some insight in their perspective regarding form one selection process in a county in Kenya. Study respondents consisted of parents who had taken their children to form one 2015 and were purposively selected for the study. Their recruitment was varied. Some of the parents were known to the research assistants and therefore were recruited for the study. Others were recruited through snowball sampling i.e. through parents, relatives and friends who were known to the research assistants (Kumar, 2005; Cohen, et al., 2011). Research assistants also used various occasions such as academic day and fundraising drive, among others to recruit the study respondents. During the recruitment process, respondents were explained the purpose of the study and its implications to them. They were also explained how to complete questionnaires and were also assured of confidentiality and anonymity. The respondents gave verbal consent and shortly after were given questionnaires to complete. Data collection exercise lasted for five months (February to May, 2015). A total of 150 questionnaires were returned representing in a response rate of 83.3 %. Closed-ended items were processed and analysed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) resulting in descriptive data, whereas open-ended data or comments were analysed into themes or categories and used to clarify or expand respective study findings reported in this article.

Result

Respondents' characteristics

Just over half (52.3%, n=150), of the respondents were female and also just over half (54.9%, n=150) teachers. Other respondents include farmer (25%); civil servants (11.8%); business persons (5.6%); civil engineer (0.7%)

and miner (0.7%). This suggests that respondents were from diverse background which may contribute to the richness of data.

Students' form one KCPE marks

Table1: Showing the form one KCPE Marks

KCPE Marks scored	% (n=150)
101- 200	0.7%
201- 300	32.7%
301- 400	65.3%
Over 401	1.3%
Total	**100**

Just about one third of the students scored 201-300 and another just fewer than two-third scored 301- 400 marks. Just 2 students scored over 401marks. Further analysis reveal that just over half (50.7%, n=150) of the students were male.

Table2: Showing the category of schools form one students joined

Category of school form one joined	% (n=150)
National	8.7%
County	58.4%
District	32.9
Total	**100**

Just fewer than three-fifths of the students joined county schools and just over three-tenths joined district schools and fewer than 10% joined national schools.

Item requirement (compulsory)

Table3: Showing the cost of items required by schools

Cost of items required by schools	% (n=150)
0- 10000	12.9%
10001- 20000	66%
20001- 30000	19.7%
Over 30000	1.4%
Total	**100**

Just two- thirds of the respondents indicate that the entry items requirement (compulsory for admission) for form one cost 10001- 20000 shillings. These are regarded as indirect cost to education. A small number of parents indicated items requirement costing over 30,000 shillings. Further analysis reveal that some of the parents felt that the items were expensive, many, that they were compulsory for admission and that other items were not relevant for the school. Further analysis also reveals that 90.9 % (n=150) of the parents indicated agree or strongly agree, that the items have increased over the past two years. Also 90.7% (n=150) of them indicated agree or strongly agree, that the items required were putting pressure on parents and that (83.8%, n=150, agree or strongly agree) the items required negatively affected children's access to certain schools. In other words the items acted as barriers to students to join certain schools. As a result parents who could not afford the items required for entry were forced to send their children to poor local harambee secondary schools thus denying students good opportunities and positive teaching -learning environment to further their studies.

Respondents were asked to make comments regarding entry items in order to make education more accessible to all students. The result is illustrated in table 4 below.

Table 4: Showing what the government need to do about entry items requirement to make education more accessible to all

What the government need to do about entry item requirement	% (n=150)
Reduce tax on school items	10.2%
Provide bursary to needy students	9.4%
Provide the necessities to students	34.4%
Subsidy on items e.g.. books	21.1%
Reduce the entry items requirement	11.7%
Reduce school fees	13.3%
Total	**100**

Just over one third of the parents felt that the government need to do something about such items so that students can afford. Some of the comments made in relation to what the government should do to entry item requirements include:

- "*Contribute some money to schools for basic needs like mattresses, blankets and expensive books*."[Respondent 129]
- "*They should intervene and make sure that the prices are not increased beyond the market price and if possible subsidise them for the parents."*[Respondent 93]
- "*The government should meet the needs of the needy students*." [Respondent 92]
- "*In earlier years the government used to provide all the necessary items that a students needed in school. This ensured that all children had equal opportunity. In addition the less fortunate children could access education. This ought to be reverted back" (Sic)* [Respondent 90]
- "*The government to provide some of the items to cut down the cost for parents*." [Respondent 104]
- "*Government should provide such requirements by providing funds to secondary schools so that when students report they are provided fully with all required items.*" [Respondent 103]
- "The *government to provide learning materials, especially text books, kamusi, dictionaries and atlases to schools. This will assist parents in buying entry items. The school will also be more accessible to all students."(Sic)* [Respondent 43]

It is clear from the foregoing comments that the parents feel that the government should to do something with entry item requirements in order to make education accessible to all and especially the less fortunate ones.

Fee payment levels

In terms of school fee, a majority of the parents felt that although public secondary education in subsidised, it is becoming increasingly inaccessible particularly to children from poor household. This view was supported by 80.6% who indicated agree or strongly agree.

Table 5: Showing annual fee payment of various schools that form one students joined

Annual fee payment of various schools in Kenyan shillings	% (n=150)
30000- 45000	51.8%
46000- 60000	32.6%
60000- 66000	7.8%
Over 66000	7.8%
Total	**100**

Just fewer than 90% of the school charged a fee of 30,000- 60,000. A small number (15.6%) charged over 60,000. Parents were asked to make comments on the fee payment level of their child's public secondary schools.

Their comments are illustrated on table 6 below.

Table 6: Showing respondents' comments on fee payment levels

Respondents' comments on fee payment levels	% (n=150)
Fair	25.4%
High	27%
Very high	43.7%
Below average	4%
Total	**100**

Just over 70% of the parents felt that fee payment levels were high or very high.

Skimming through the comments made by parents, there is evidence that they are varied even within the same fee level, for instance, those on 30,000- 45,000 fee levels their comments include- good, quite high, very high, many parents cannot access, it is fair compared to other schools of the same level, the fee payment is average and fee payment is below average. These comments were made by teachers, civil servants, and business man and farmers parents. For instance, one teacher made a comment that "the *level of payment as per the present economy is enough to meet the needs of the student per year."* Another teacher said "*Considering the level of economy in most households this is a big burden to the parents*." Another teacher said "fee *payment is below average*." Yet another teacher said that the "fee payment was reasonable." A farmer commented thus "I will struggle to meet the payment although with a lot of difficulties."(Sic). Another farmer said "*the level of school fee payment is not actually bad; it is fine according to my income*." Another farmer said "it is fair compared to other schools of the same level." Yet another farmer said that "fee *payment is too high*." According to the business man "*the government still need to reduce fee to affordable amount. Most Kenyans are of low income and cannot meet to pay school fees for all the children he may have*." (Sic). A civil servant said "quite high". Based on the foregone comments the challenges associated with fee payment levels, are mixed and may not be linked to the parents' occupation but rather, perhaps to their financial circumstances. However, two teachers linked their comments to the state of facilities in the schools:

- "*Expensive compared to the facilities available in the school.*" [Respondent 91]
- "*Fair but they need to improve on the school environment for favourable learning environment*" [Respondent 93]

The two comments seem to suggest that although schools were charging fee some expensively, the school environment or infrastructure did not benefit much. In other words there was no correspondence between level of fee payment and the status of the school environment and/or facilities.

It was also important to find out how parents viewed fee payment levels with similar schools. The result is illustrated in table 7 below.

Table 7: Showing comparisons of fee payment levels with other similar schools

Comparison of fee payment levels with other similar schools	% (n=150)
Almost similar	54.7%
Much higher than similar schools	24.8%
Little lower than similar schools	14.6%
Not quite sure	5.8%
Total	**100**

Just over half (54.7%) of the respondents felt that fee payment levels was almost similar to similar schools.

Regarding the level of government subsidy in public secondary schools, just fewer than 60% of the parents felt that the amount should be increased. Some comments linked to subsidy include:

- "*There is still need for the government to increase their subsidy in secondary schools. Most parents have opted to take their students to day-schools because they cannot afford to pay for boarding school.*"(Sic) [Respondent 43]
- "*Government subsidy is too little to maintain secondary schools*."[Respondent125]
- "*In my observations there is no subsidy in secondary schools since sub-county schools range from 25,000 -35,000 very expensive, over taxing parents. County schools range from 45,000- 70,000 and National schools range from 70,000- 140,000. That means if a child from a poor family is called to join a national school he or she would not join.*" [Respondents 116].

Discussion

The study set out to investigate cost sharing policy practices in public secondary schools in a county in Kenya. The study respondents were parents whose children joined form one in 2015.The study focused specifically on levels of fee payment and entry item requirements.

Entry item requirements

It is evident from the study that parents were being asked to buy various items that schools have made compulsory entry items without which students may not be allowed into schools despite paying full school fees. Such items constitute indirect cost to education and include : torches, sufuria (cooking bans), plastic chair, umbrella, Oxford geometrical set, spring files, a ream or two of photocopy papers, secondary school atlas, Oxford advanced learners' dictionary, song books, Swahili reading books, English reading books, mattresses, a pair of bed sheets, blankets, Kamusi, pens and pencils, among others. Table 3 indicate that parents spend a lot of shillings to buy the items required. They were compulsory for admission; they were expensive and parent felt that they were not all relevant. Besides, they were putting enormous pressure on the parents. Above all, they negatively affected some children's access to certain schools. This is supported by Ishengoma (2004) that out of pocket costs e.g. school uniform costs; among others continue to impede education access. Some parents felt that the government needed to reduce tax on school items as well as introduce subsidy on items e.g. books.

Levels of fee payment

It is evident from the study also that levels of fee payment were high or very high (see table 6) despite it being subsidised by the government. In some cases it was similar or much higher than similar schools (see table 7). The fee payment burden affected all parents regardless of their occupation. For instance, both teachers and farmers alike complained of higher levels of fee payment burdens. Consequently, as also noted by Ayodo and Too (2013) affordable secondary schools continue to remain elusive, especially to children from poor household background.

Conclusion and Recommendation

Levels of fees payments and the entry items requirements are the two most challenges that parent face as they attempt to support their children educationally. They are ever on the rise. As a result parents in the study strongly recommend that the government increases its subsidy to schools as well as introduce subsidy on the entry items requirement. These two negatively affect access to education in public secondary schools in the country. The two also denies students good opportunities to join secondary schools with a positive teaching-learning environment.

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