The Role of the School Principal in the Implementation of the Free Secondary Education

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Abstract

This study investigated the role of head teachers’ effectiveness in the implementation of free secondary education in Keiyo District, Kenya. The study was a descriptive research that examined the situation as it was on the ground without any manipulation of variables. The target population of the study comprised a total of 37 secondary schools that present candidates for KCSE in Keiyo district. Keiyo District was chosen in this study because it is one of the districts with a high poverty index and therefore, likely to benefit more from the FSE policy. The sample consisted of 25 secondary schools drawn through stratified random sampling technique. The instruments for data collection were: self-administered questionnaires, interview schedule and document analysis. The study established that the FSE was introduced in haste hence the head teachers were not prepared before FSE implementation. Overall management of the school had improved although the FSE programme still experienced some teething problems that included: late disbursement of funds by government, inadequate funds to cater for the entire vote heads, misconception by parents that FSE policy catered for all the fees and fluctuation of market prices of commodities. The study recommendations include the need to avail the free education funds to the schools at the beginning of the year.

Keywords: Education, Free, Head Teachers, Kenya, Secondary, Policy

Introduction

Education is fundamental in the development of human persons and has been viewed principally in light of a fundamental human right (Kyalo et al., 2006). Due to Kenyan government’s desire to achieve the Millennium Development Goals, there was need to invest more in education, the hence the implementation of Free Secondary Education (FSE) in 2008 also as a response to upsurge of students from primary schools due to the implementation of Free Primary Education (FPE) in January 2003 (Malenya, 2008; Orando, 2009). The government waived tuition fees as it constituted a significant proportion of the finances required in meeting the cost of secondary school education which was a reprieve to parents, guardians and sponsors (Malenya, 2008).
Each student was entitled to a provision of Kshs, 10,265/= per year to cover tuition, administrative costs, repairs, maintenance, improvement, local travel and transport, electricity/water and conservancy, activity, personal emolument and medical. On the other hand, parents only paid boarding costs to a maximum of Kshs, 18,265/= per annum (for students in boarding schools)-IPS News Africa in Juma (2009).

The haphazard manner in which the programme was implemented after political campaign promises of 2007 and lack of policy paper in the enactment of the FSE programme clearly suggests that there was little research done before the implementation of the programme. Given the political circumstances out of which the FSE policy appears to have been concerned with, the policy was received with mixed feelings and reactions. For instance, critics have seen the policy, as a populist move that will in real terms, be a burden to parents. There have been arguments such as: “Free Secondary Education will occasion an influx that will certainly strain the existing physical facilities and human resources; triggering schools to slap building and expansion levies on parents, as the government taxes citizens more to raise tuition for the bulging number of students and pay more teachers” (Otieno, 2007). Thus management of the schools was affected by this sudden development.

According to the New Policy of FSE; the Government pays Ksh.10, 265 per student annually as tuition fees (MOE, 2009). This leaves day-scholars with only uniforms, building and activity fees to pay. Their boarding counterparts, however, pay a maximum of shs.18, 265/= to meet the extra requirements (Kimani, 2008).

There were conflicts that were reported in some schools resulting from lack of proper education of the public on the implications of Free Secondary Education Policy. The plan which was introduced in the year 2008 has been experiencing problems such as: the delay in disbursement of the funds to schools, high student enrolments, and lack of adequate classrooms, congestion, and lack of teachers, facilities and quality education compromised.

Success in implementing FSE is possible when it is done with excellent skills to achieve expected school performance. Carron et al. (2005) assert that the secondary schools major task in improving school academic performance is to provide sound school leadership after major policy changes. Fry and O’Neill (2002) note: “We know that if we can have a dramatic impact on raising the quality of school performance, we will have a dramatic improvement in student achievement across the board.”

Management Practices In Schools

Management is the process of working with and through others to achieve organizational objectives in a changing environment. Franklin (2002) defines management as a distinct process consisting of activities of planning, organizing actuating and controlling performed to determine and accomplished stated objectives with the use of human beings and other resources. While Management is a system or structure, teacher empowerment represents an internal perception of having increased authority in their positions. Another closely related concept, teacher
leadership, includes teacher participation in management as part of a broader leadership role both within and outside of the classroom.

The works of Rosenberg and Holand (1990) and Crowther (2002), describe in detail an image of teacher leadership as full participation by teachers in developing a shared vision, planning and implementing instructional improvements, working with the community, and participating in professional development in job-embedded, collegial ways, in addition to participation in management. A more narrowly defined concept is shared governance, a term used by Blasé and Blasé (2000). Shared governance refers to head teachers sharing their governing roles with teachers. It is very similar to participative management, in which teachers participate, in various ways and to varying extents, in making decisions in schools that were traditionally made by the head teacher. However, shared governance encompasses other governance or leadership roles that are distinct from management, including peer supervision or evaluation, action research and school data analysis, and leadership in such areas as staff development and personnel hiring (Blase and Blase, 2000). A related term, participative management, refers to the management strategy of head teachers that leads to teacher participation.

An effective and efficient manager must possess the technical, human and conceptual skills in order to be a good (Franklin, 2002). As highlighted by the author noted, the technical knowledge and skill include understanding and being proficient in using specific activity such as a process, technique or procedure. The school managers must be equipped with the knowledge and skill to perform administrative duties in the school. This will include planning the daily routine among other duties.

In a learning institution; a head teacher should develop a good interpersonal relationship with the teachers, support staff, committee and with the community in order to avoid resistance to any change that he or she introduces and to ensure success in meeting their objectives. Kreither (2000) supports this view when he says that “a manager experienced a number of interpersonal problems; among other things they were perceived as manipulative, abusive, untrustworthy, demeaning, overly critical not team players, and poor communication”.

School managers should be equipped with the management skills and techniques such as management by objectives. This is because management is concerned with the conversion of diverse resources among them people, machine, materials, money and time into a useful enterprise. The success in the achievement of goals will depend on how effective and efficient the physical and human resources are utilized and how the existing the aims and objectives of the enterprise.

Financial support of the secondary school by the government does not mean that schools will be without trouble. There are uncontrolled and unforeseen circumstances that make it difficult for services to be delivered effectively. The school managers should be well versed with procurement procedures and financial management so as to ensure that the finances given to them are properly accounted for. This is necessary because an enterprise can remain effective only when there is proper direction and control of its day-to-day activities. The school manager
is entrusted with the shaping of the attitudes, behavior and imparting skills to the students hence shape the destiny of the nation.

All major studies on innovations and school effectiveness reveal that the principal strongly influences the likelihood of change. Maranga (2007) found that projects that are actively supported by the principal were most likely to fare well because their actions seem to be legitimate whether a change is to be taken seriously and to support teachers both psychologically and with resources (Fullan, 1992).

The principal plays a major role in effective implementation because he is the person most likely to shape the organizational conditions necessary for the success, such as development of shared goals, work structure, climate and procedures for monitoring results. He or she is an administrator, a problem solver and a facilitator of change. He or she has to spearhead any change in the school by giving direction, inspiration and above all, design plan and oversee that change is implemented effectively.

Findings by Fullan (1992) reveal that school improvement can be most effective when teachers and administrators frequently observe each other teaching and provide each other with useful evaluation of teaching. They can plan and prepare teaching and materials together to share the burden of curriculum development. This will also reduce resistance to change, which is a barrier to successful implementation. The foregoing review demonstrate that implementation of a new curriculum is directly related to immediate administration support.

In Kenya, educational administration encompasses all those in directing, management and control of the education enterprise. They range from the permanent secretary and his team of personnel at the headquarters, the director of education, the provincial director of education, to the district education officers, inspector of schools, and head teacher. Mbiti (2004) asserts that in order to facilitate efficiency in curriculum development and implementation through administration policies, the following should be observed: coordination between the Ministry and such group as K.I.E personnel, inspectorate, publishers, teachers, colleges and schools before the time of implementation, communication through circulars and feedback reports from field officers, the freedom to express ideas about curriculum matters leading to improvement.

Administrative support is also provided through supervision by school administration and inspectors of schools. According to (Olembo, Wanga and Karagu, 1992) supervisory roles include working closely with teachers to establish their problem and needs of pupils, building strong group morale and securing effective teamwork among teachers and providing assistance to teachers so as to help them develop greater competence. The inspectors can also assist teachers to identify and analyze learning difficulties and helping planning effective remedial instruction.

Lack of constant and close contacts between supervisors and schools due to lack of funds from the headquarters. Research finding reveal that sometimes inspectors only visit schools at the
request of the head teachers, or when there are critical problems in the respective schools. In order to achieve real change in practice, there should be continuous support from inspectors, education administrators, the principal and other education administrators during the stage of implementation. Their role is very crucial and should continue through implementation effort and especially where wide range changes are concerned to provide material resources, training, financial support and motivation to teachers.

Theoretical Framework

The study was based on contingency management theory, propounded by Fiedler (1967), cited in Sergiovani and Carver (1980) which outline factors that influence leadership effectiveness. The contingency theory of Fiedler (1967) points out that effective performance can only be achieved by matching the manager to the situation or by changing the situation. This theory was relevant since it stresses the need to apply leadership styles that befit the changing school situation. The principals as shown by the theory should understand that every school is a complex structure with its own distinctive characteristics, which impinge upon the way it can be managed in an event of change. Some of the characteristics that schools leadership needs to look into include the institutional, structural and environmental that directly or indirectly influences the effectiveness of the school in achieving proper academic performance.

Methodology

Research Design

The study was a descriptive survey research design. The study used qualitative research methodologies to collect data and explain phenomena more deeply using words/statements and events and phenomena through open-ended questions and interviews schedule. On the other hand, quantitative approach was used through questionnaire.

Study Area

This study was conducted in Keiyo District, which is one of the sixteen Districts in Rift Valley Province of Kenya. Administratively, the District is further subdivided into six divisions and a further 14 locations and numerous villages scattered across its length and breadth. The main farming activities within the entire District include cultivation of cereals such as maize. The produce from agriculture and livestock is largely for domestic consumption but any surplus is sold to acquire income, which is used to meet basic needs and payment of school fees, GoK, (1997-2001). Therefore the implementation of FSE policy came in handy because the output from the farms is insufficient to pay school fees.

Sampling and Sampling Procedure

The participants in the study comprised of secondary school head teachers who were involved in management of the schools. The district had a total of 37 secondary school head teachers at
the point when the study was carried out. Stratified sampling technique was used to select samples from the population. It was deemed appropriate since the research was based on heterogeneous population, which ensured that the desired representation from various subgroups from the population was achieved. The researcher sampled 50 percent of the schools in the district.

Findings

1. Level of Head teachers’ Effectiveness in Implementing FSE

Awareness and Preparedness

The declaration of FSE in January 2008 was contained in the election manifesto of Party of National Unity (PNU). The PNU politicians had pledged that if elected to power they would ensure that all children get subsidized secondary education. After forming government after the December 2007 elections, the new government declared free tuition in all public secondary schools in the country 2008. The purpose of the study was to establish the extent to which head teachers were prepared before the implementation of FSE policy. However, most of them got the awareness through the media and from the political campaigns. They had hopes that if the new government was voted in, all students would get subsidized secondary education. Some were also aware of the trends in the world through the campaigns of EFA whose aim was to provide Education For All by 2015. This was further enhanced by the children’s Act passed in 2001 which declared that basic education was every child’s right. Moreover the respondents had witnessed FPE Implementation, which had taken place in 2003 at the public primary schools.

Despite many of them being aware of possibilities of free education being provided, they were not aware of the challenges associated with it such as lateness in disbursement of funds from MOE, fluctuation of commodities prices, inadequacy of the funds and misconception among parents who thought secondary education was completely free.

In-service Courses

Training or preparation of the head teachers for the implementation of FSE was vital. This was because FSE was profound change in the education system therefore, those involved had to ensure that it was a success. The head teachers’ play a central role in that, they are agents of change in their schools hence, it is important that they are educated and communicated on their important the role of ensuring FSE is a success. The MOEST through the inspectorate had to ensure that the head teachers are trained on how to supervise the implementation of FSE. The government invested lots of money in the FSE policy some of which were borrowed from the development partners (i.e. JICA, USAID) hence, any wastage had to be reduced. As a result the MOEST was precise on how the FSE funds were to be spent. Those who attempted to spend the funds contrary to the guidelines issued were disciplined.
The education officers had to in-service the B.O.G, Head teachers, Bursars, Accounts clerk storekeepers and other support staff on how to successfully manage FSE. The head teachers were asked to indicate whether they received any training prior to the implementation of FSE and areas covered in training. The head teachers who attended in-service course 4(16%) were on financial management, 2(8%) cited procurement as the center of focus, while 19(76%) had not attended any in-service course before the implementation of FSE. The head teachers who attended in-service course, seminar or conference before implementation of FSE were very few compared to those who had not received training of any kind.

Circular from MOEST

The head teachers were asked to indicate whether they received circulars from the ministry of education regarding how FSE should be implemented. Use of circulars in schools enhances communication and gives directions, which can be easily understood. They are an official means of communication of an institution in an organization, Wittenberger (1996). Writing a circular has advantages in providing a record of the communication and enabling communication with a large number of people. The circulars provided to the schools by MoEST are used to provide awareness and information that could enhance head teachers’ levels of competence in management of schools. Majority of the head teachers received the circulars on how to implement FSE policy thus were equipped with adequate information to use.

Bodies that Organized In-Service Courses

The head teachers were asked to indicate the educational bodies that organized the in-service course they attended on how to ensure the process of the implementation of FSE was a success from list they were provided with. The list comprised of institution such as KESI, Quality assurance, KIA, PDE, DEO, TSC, and KSSHA. From their responses, majority 18(72%) had attended courses organized by the inspectorate through the DEO’s office while QASO is (48%), KESI 12(48%) PDE 5 (20%), KSSHA, 6 (24%). However none had attended any course organized by KIA and TSC respectively. The study found out that there was need for coordination of various bodies that organize in-service training for head teachers. Each body should also have a specialized role on various areas of in-service training foe head teachers.

Focus of Training

The respondents were provided with a list showing topics likely to have been covered was given to them and they were to tick those they had covered. Majority of the head teachers 24(96%) were trained on financial management, 20(80%) received training on implementation of FSE, 14(56%), covered leadership in education and 15 (60%) while decision making and problem solving 15(60%).
Conclusion

Regarding the roles of the principals in implementing the FSE it was established that though the head teachers were not prepared prior to implementation of FSE they later underwent training facilitated by various bodies. Most teachers employed instruction and facilitation techniques in the implementation of FSE policy. They formed various committees that spearheaded the implementation process, particularly tendering and procurement committees. They organized training of personnel both internally and externally. Efforts were made by most head teachers to sensitize the stakeholders on their new roles after FSE implementation. The study found out that the overall management of the school had improved though they still experience some teething problems for instance the study found out that the school management had problems in planning. This is due to the fact that the school management is not certain of the amount of funds they receive since this was only communicated to them once the government received the funds.

These challenges included: late disbursement of funds by the Ministry of Education, FSE funds are inadequate to cater for the entire vote heads, misconception by parents that FSE policy catered for all the fees, fluctuation of market prices of commodities thus interfering with the budget and shortage of human resources.

The conclusions drawn were that most of the challenges experienced in schools were as a result of the implementation of FSE. The only challenge that was not associated with FSE was the shortage of teachers. It was also concluded that FSE has succeeded in providing adequate teaching, learning resources as it was intended, however, most parents still carry the burden of catering for others vote heads for instance; developments, transport, among others.

Recommendations

From the discussion of findings and conclusions the following general recommendations are offered:

1) The Ministry of Education should avail the free education funds to the schools at the beginning of the year to enable the schools management to forecast and plan ahead. In addition, the government should consider increasing the funding immensely. It should revise the current provision of ksh.10, 265/= which it started providing three years ago and upgrade the figure considering the current inflationary trends.

2) There is need to step up efforts in capacity building of principals and stakeholders in the government subsidized secondary education through workshops, seminars, and in servicing concerning the FSE policy’s goals and expectations to enable them to utilize physical resources provided by the policy. Training programme for the stakeholders in education should be continuous.
References


