

Influence of Parents' Ability to Pay User Charges on Students' Participation in Public Day Secondary Schools in Makueni County, Kenya

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ABSTRACT

The study sought to determine the influence of parents' ability to pay user charges in public day secondary schools in Makueni County, Kenya. The study was guided by human capital theory which was developed by Schultz in 1961. The study employed concurrent research design of mixed methods methodology. Target population was 250 principals, 380 Form 4 class teachers, 250 PA chair persons and 108 area chiefs. The sample size included 50 principals, 76 class teachers, 50 PA chairpersons and 20 chiefs, making a total of 196 research participants. Data was collected using questionnaires, interview schedules and document analysis. Quantitative data was analyzed using descriptive and inferential analysis using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 24 and presented using frequency tables and graphs while qualitative data was analyzed thematically and presented using narratives and appropriate verbatim quotes. Descriptive statistics used were mainly mean and standard deviation while inferential statistics used were both correlation and regression analyses. Pearsons's correlation coefficient was used to determine association /correlation between parents' ability to pay user charges and students' participation in public day secondary schools in Makueni County. Bivariate regression analysis was used to show the influence of parents' ability to pay user charges on students' participation in public day secondary schools in Makueni County. The study established that parents' ability to pay user charges positively and significantly influenced students' participation in public day secondary schools in Makueni County. The study recommended that; government should increase the amount of FDSE allocations channeled to schools to cover user charges imposed, boost scholarships and bursary schemes and also implement feeding programme for the day scholars.

Keywords: User Charges, Students' Participation, Public Day Secondary Schools, Makueni County, Kenya.

INTRODUCTION

Education plays a very vital part in the economic, social and political development of any nation. Most parts of the world, education is regarded and recognized as a basic human right for every child (UNESCO, 2009). Therefore, despite the high cost of education many governments and families invest very much in all levels of education.

Education is a stand-alone goal (SDG 4) in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The SDG 4 aims to ensure inclusive and equitable education and promotion of lifelong learning opportunities for all. The

target 4.1 states that by 2030 all girls and boys should complete free, equitable and quality primary and secondary education without discrimination. It is against this background that most of the countries all over the world have tried to provide free education so that each and every child can participate regardless of individual socio-economic background. In other words, governments are trying to make education accessible to those children from low socio-economic background by abolishing school fees (The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development).

Parents' ability to pay user charges refers to the parents' financial power to meet the secondary school financial requirements of their children. User charges are the fees that households have to pay for the publicly provided education. User charges include; cost of school uniform, Parents- Teachers Association (PTA) dues, cost of school lunch, transport cost, tuition fees, and cost of textbooks, rental payments, exam fees and community contribution to the District Education Board among others (Kattan & Burnett, 2004). User charges have played a great role in keeping the children from low economic background out of school and making it very hard for them to remain in school and complete basic education. Therefore, the ability of the parents to pay user charges determines children's enrollment, daily attendance and completion.

As indicated from various studies, in most countries secondary education has been made free to enhance students' participation. For instances, in Europe free education was offered by 1994 where the governments of European countries provided finances for teachers' salaries, exam dues and games and sports (Szirmal, 2005). Later, the government became unable to solely continue funding education due to inflation and therefore cost sharing was introduced. Introduction of cost sharing policy caused students to drop out of school and hence negatively influenced students' participation in education (Szirmal 2005). In United States, a conditional cash transfer paid to sixteen to eighteen years old was effective in decreasing drop out and increasing participation rate to 4.5% in the 1st year and 6.7% for those receiving 2 years of education (Dearden et al., 2005).

A study carried out by World Bank in 2009 showed that approximately 71 countries had same type of user charges but 4 countries offered free secondary education. From the study, the common user charges were money for uniform, textbook, tuition among others. It was reported that user charges influenced students' enrolments in secondary schools, where majority of the parents said that it was not easy to get school fees and that is why students were occasionally absent from school (World Bank, 2009). The study also revealed that, these costs represent large percentage of total household spending and are particularly burdensome for those families that face tough choices about which children to send to school and for how long they should stay in school.

Morgan et al. (2012) concluded that eliminating school fees such as tuition fees and providing school uniforms strongly increased school enrolments and had a positive impact on the education and non-education outcomes including; age at school entry, persistence, grade advancement, attendance, re-enrolment and delayed marriage and child bearing. User charges can lead to exclusion of children whose parents do not pay for school fees leading to absenteeism and non-participation. A study carried out by Amunga et al. (2016) concluded that despite the advancements in accessing primary education, access to secondary education has remained quite low especially for students from low socio – economic status. From the study, it was evident that majority of the schools have all types of levies that have pushed up the cost of secondary education ranging from payment for plastic chairs, motivation, desks, beds, purchasing of school buses, development funds among others. It was also noted that many of the levies are re-introduced using education ministry rules which allow schools to charge other levies with the approval of Board of Management (BOM) and County Education Board (CEB). Also, school principals indicated that they hold PTA meetings where parents suggest the need to increase fees towards quality and efficiency.

Wanjalas' (2017) findings showed that students' enrolment remained low even after the introduction of subsidized secondary education mainly because the finances were inadequate and there was delay before

disbursement.

In Kenya, Free Day Secondary Education (FDSE) was officially launched by His Excellence President Mwai Kibaki in 2008. Under normal circumstances, FDSE programme was launched so that the total numbers of learners who enroll in form 1 participate wholly in education and graduate after 4 years. However, the case is totally different in Makueni County. The data obtained from Makueni County Education Office between the years 2016 -2021 shows that; In 2019, a total of 4,891 students did not complete form 4 accounting for 16.94% of students who either dropped out or repeated. In 2020 a total of 3,731 students did not complete form 4 accounting for 12.98% of students who either dropped out or repeated. Also in 2021, a total of 3,674 students did not complete form 4 accounting for 12.38% of students who either dropped out or repeated. In Makueni County, most households are poor (KNBS Makueni County, 2020) and hence parents' ability to pay user charges play a big role in students' participation in secondary schools.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVE

The study sought to achieve the following specific objective;

- To determine the influence of parents' ability to pay user charges on students' participation in public day secondary schools in Makueni County.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Mixed Methods research methodology, specifically concurrent research design was used in this study. The study targeted 250 public day secondary schools and 108 locations (KNBS MAKUENI COUNTY, 2020). Therefore, 250 principals, 380 form 4 class teachers (2022), 250 PTA chair persons and 108 area chiefs were targeted. Random sampling was used to select 20% of the principals, form 4 class teachers and PA chair persons from the schools in each sub-county and 20% of area chiefs from locations in each sub-county. Therefore, sample size consisted of 50 principals, 76 form 4 class teachers (2022), 50 PA chair persons and 20 area chiefs making a total of 196 participants. Questionnaires, interview schedules and document analysis were used to collect data in this study.

RESULTS

Parents' Ability to Pay User Charges/School Levies

The study sought to determine the influence of parents' ability to pay user charges on students' participation in public day secondary schools in Makueni County. In a bid to achieve this objective, parents' ability to pay user charges/school levies in the sampled schools was first assessed. The respondents were requested to respond to a few questions anchored on various parameters for measuring ability to pay user charges//school levies.

User Charges/School Levies Paid by Parents

The study assessed the kind of user charges which parents in the sampled public day secondary schools in Makueni County paid for their children to remain in school. The views of the PA chairpersons were considered in this case. The responses given are outlined in Table 1.

Table 1 User Charges/School Levies Paid by Parents

User Charges/School Levy	Frequency	Percent
Lunch fee	50	100.0

Remedial fee	30	60.0
Uniform fee	22	44.0
Development fee	18	36.0
PTA dues	7	14.0
Prize giving fee	2	4.0
Identity card fee	2	4.0
Teacher motivation	1	2.0

The results presented in Table 1 showed that all the PA chairpersons reported that lunch fees were charged in the said schools. Remedial fee, uniform fee and development fee were mentioned by 60.0%, 44.0% and 36.0% of the PA chairpersons. Other school levies highlighted by a number of the PA chairpersons were PTA dues, prize giving fee, identity card fee and teacher motivation charges. The above findings showed that lunch fee was the most common school levy charged across all the sampled public day secondary schools in Makueni County. Remedial fee, uniform fee and development fee were also common user charges charged in a considerable number of public day secondary schools in Makueni County. Hence, it can be argued that different user charges/school levies were imposed in public day secondary schools in Makueni County with the most outstanding being lunch fee, remedial fee, uniform fee and development fee in that order.

Approximate Annual User Charges/School Levies in the Sampled Schools

The study determined the approximate user charges/school levies that the sampled schools charged annually. The particular charges/levies considered were school uniform fee, lunch fee, development fee, remedial fee and any other charges. Seeking such information was seen necessary as it aided in evaluating the parents' ability to pay. The results based on the principals' responses are as presented in Table 2.

Table 2 Approximate Annual User Charges/School Levies in the Sampled Schools

User Charges	N	Range	Min	Max	Mean	SD
School uniform fee	23	10800	1200	12000	5930.43	2845.50
Lunch fee	50	15000	1500	16500	9657.80	4619.28
Development fee	13	9000	1000	10000	3692.31	2496.15
Remedial fee	27	3500	1000	4500	2555.56	1288.51

The findings given in Table 2 showed that in the 23 schools that charged school uniform fee, the fee ranged from KShs. 1200 to 12000 where the average was KShs. 5930.43 with a standard deviation of 2845.50. Regarding the lunch fee, the study noted that the minimum fee charged in the 50 sampled schools was KShs. 1500 while the maximum was KShs. 16500. The average lunch fees charged among these schools was KShs. 9657.8 with a standard deviation of 4619.283. The range of development fees charged in 13 out of the 50 sampled schools was KShs. 9000 where the average was KShs. 3692.31 with a standard deviation of KShs. 2496.15. For remedial fees, the minimum and maximum fee charged in the 27 schools with such levies was KShs. 1000 and KShs. 4500 respectively. The average remedial fee charged among these schools was KShs. 2555.56 while the standard deviation was KShs. 1288.51. Since the standard deviation in all the four cases was relatively lower when compared to the means, it was inferred that the data points for the school uniform fee, lunch fee, development fee and remedial fee were closely clustered around the means, indicating less variability from the mean. This meant that there was less variability in the school uniform

fee, lunch fee, development fee and remedial fee charged in the sampled public secondary schools in Makeni County. In 2 of the sampled schools, KShs. 1000 prize giving levy was charged, in other two (2) schools, KShs. 200 and KShs.250 was charged to cater for identity cards and NEMIS.

Parents’ Ability to Pay User Charges/School Levies on Time

The principals and the Form 4 class teachers also reacted to various statements regarding parents’ ability to pay user charges or school levies by indicating the extent they agreed or disagreed with the statements based on a five-point Likert scale. The mean of responses for the different statements (items) and also the composite mean for the construct were interpreted using a scale interval where a mean value of (1.000-1.499) indicated strongly disagree, (1.500-2.499) indicated disagree, (2.500-3.499) indicated neutral, (3.500-4.499) indicated agree while (4.500-5.000) was an indication of strongly agree. This interpretation was applied for all the constructs in this study. The separate responses of the principals are presented in Table 3.

Table 3 Principals’ Responses on Parents’ Ability to Pay User Charges/School Levies

Statement	Valid N	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree	Mean	SD
Most parents pay school uniform fee in time in this school	23	4.30%	34.80%	8.70%	43.50%	8.70%	3.174	1.154
Most parents pay development fee in time in this school	13	7.70%	69.20%	15.40%	0.00%	7.70%	2.308	0.947
Most parents pay lunch contribution fee in time in this school	50	24.00%	44.00%	16.00%	14.00%	2.00%	2.260	1.046
Most parents pay remedial fee in time in this school	27	33.30%	40.70%	14.80%	11.10%	0.00%	2.037	0.980
Composite Mean and Standard Deviation							2.255	1.018
Valid N=50								

From the results given in Table 3, it was evident that the principals on average held a neutral view regarding whether most parents in their school paid school uniform fees in time as depicted by a mean value of 3.174. On the other hand, the principals on average disagreed that most parents in their school paid development, lunch and remedial fees in time as supported by the mean values equal to 2.308, 2.260 and 2.037 respectively. The composite mean value of 2.255 for the construct meant that on average, the principals disagreed with most of the statements presented on parents’ ability to pay user charges/school levies. Based on the principals’ responses, it can be argued that most parents in the sampled public day secondary schools in Makeni County struggled to pay various school levies in time. Table 4 shows the Form 4 class teachers’ reaction to the four (4) items on the parents’ ability to pay user charges/school levies construct.

Table 4 Form 4 Class Teachers’ Responses on Parents’ Ability to Pay User Charges

	Valid N	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree	Mean	SD
Most parents pay school uniform fee in time in this school	67	20.90%	38.80%	17.90%	19.40%	3.00%	2.448	1.118

Most parents pay lunch contribution fee in time in this school	72	16.70%	55.60%	12.50%	13.90%	1.40%	2.278	0.953
Most parents pay remedial fee in time in this school	71	35.20%	42.30%	11.30%	8.50%	2.80%	2.014	1.035
Most parents pay development fee in time in this school	69	34.80%	52.20%	8.70%	4.30%	0.00%	1.826	0.766
Composite Mean and Standard Deviation							2.138	0.756
Valid N=72								

The study, based on the findings outlined in Table 4, found that the Form 4 class teachers disagreed that most parents in their schools, paid school uniform fee, lunch contribution fee, remedial fee and development fee in time as demonstrated by the means of responses of 2.448, 2.278, 2.014 and 1.826 respectively. The composite mean value of 2.138 was an indication that the sampled Form 4 class teachers were on average, in disagreement with the statements presented on parents' ability to pay user charges/school levies. It was evident that the arguments of the Form 4 class teachers on parents' ability to pay user charges were consistent with the principals' views that most parents in the sampled public day secondary schools in Makueni County struggled to pay the diverse school levies charged in time. The views of the principals and Form 4 class teachers were reiterated by the area chiefs who unanimously observed that students in the public day secondary schools in their areas were frequently sent home to collect school fees. Some of the responses of the area chiefs were as follows: –*“Yes, students are seen going home almost every month to collect fees” CH2 ... “Yes, especially small schools” CH3 ... “Yes, it has been a tradition for schools in this area to send students home” CH5 ... “Yes, in this area, parents have to be reminded to pay fees” CH13 ... “Yes, the day schools in this area have children from low economic background. Hence, the parents do not pay school fees in time” CH14*

Regarding the frequency of sending students home to collect school fees per term, one of area chiefs indicated that this was done once, 7 (35.0%) reported twice per term while the rest, 12 (60.0%) in number, argued that students were sent home to collect school fees in the said schools more than twice per term. Some of the area chiefs explained that: – *“Almost every month, in this area parents are not committed to paying school fees” CH8 “Almost every end of the month” CH10 “I think more than twice a term. It is also my concern because some day schools are sending them home even on a weekly basis” CH17*

Hence, it can be said that cases of students being send home to collect school fees occurred on a frequent basis in the public day secondary schools in Makueni County. According to the majority of the area chiefs, 15 (75.0%) in number, low incomes or poverty was the main reason as to why students were sent home to collect school fees as the parents experienced difficulties in paying the required school fees on time. Two of the chiefs highlighted that: –

“Parents are willing to pay but most of them have no or very little income” CH1 “Most parent are poor and hence, find it hard to pay in time” CH12

The rest of the area chiefs argued that some students were sent home to collect school fees due to parents' laxity or ignorance to pay school fees on time, only doing so when the students were sent home. All the chiefs reported that the fees charged in the public day secondary schools in Makueni County was reasonable.

Perceived Link between Parents’ Ability to Pay User Charges and Students’ Participation

The views of the different categories regarding the implications of parents’ ability to pay user charges/school levies on students’ participation in public day secondary schools in Makueni County were further sought. The principals’ and form 4 class teachers’ views regarding the extent parents’ ability to pay influenced students’ participation in terms of enrolment, regular school attendance and completion of studies are presented in Figure 1

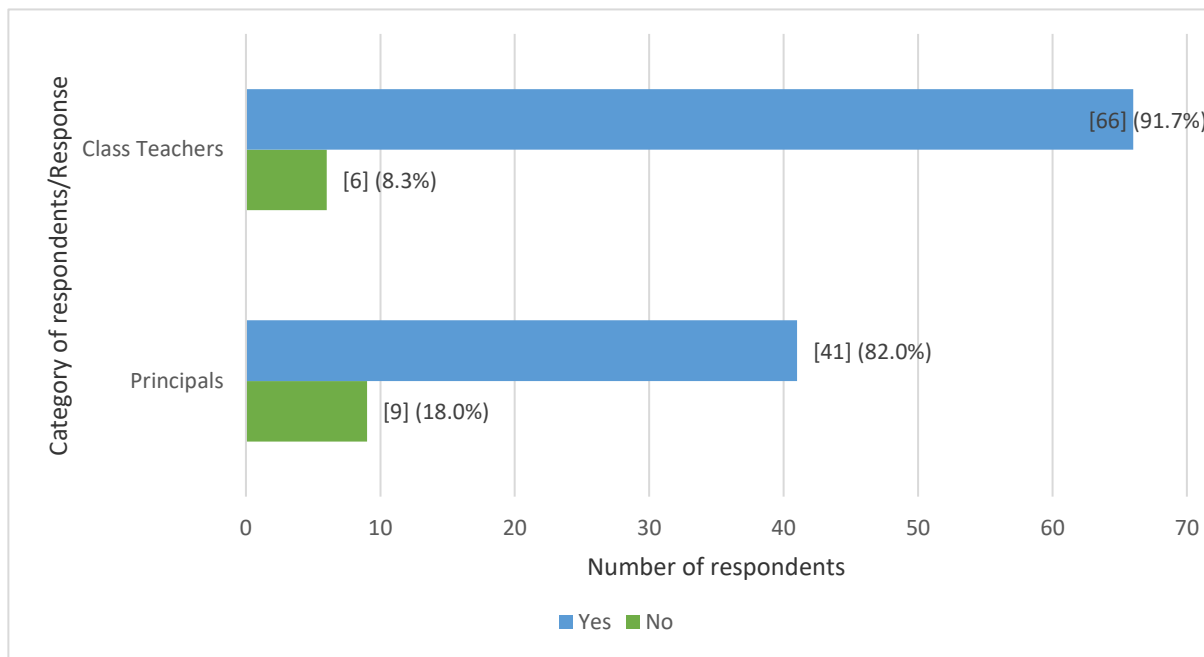
Figure 1 Parents’ Ability to Pay User Charges and Enrolment, Regular School Attendance and Completion of Studies



The study findings displayed in Figure 1 demonstrated that majority of the principals and Form 4 class teachers reported that students’ regular school attendance and completion were to a great extent influenced by parents’ ability to pay user charges/school levies. On the other hand, slightly more than half of the principals (52.0%) and Form 4 class teachers (52.8%) noted that enrolment of students in their schools was

greatly influenced by the ability of parents to pay user charges. A considerable number of principals (40.0%) and Form 4 class teachers (38.9%) argued that students’ enrolment in their schools was influenced by parents’ ability to pay user charges/school levies only to some extent. The above findings suggested that in deed, parents’ ability to pay user charges/school levies to varying degree influenced students’ participation in public day secondary schools in Makueni County in terms of enrolment, regular school attendance and completion of studies. The responses of the principals and Form 4 class teachers on whether dropout cases due to fees problems had been reported in the sampled public day secondary schools in Makueni County are provided in Figure 2.

Figure 2 Reported Dropout Cases Due to Fees Problems



The findings displayed in Figure showed that the majority of the principals (82.0%) and Form 4 class teachers (91.7%) indicated that dropout cases due to fees problems had occurred in their schools. This finding affirmed the observation that parents’ ability to pay user charges influenced students’ completion of studies in the public day secondary schools in Makueni County. From the responses of the PA chairpersons, the majority of them, 37 (74.0%) in number, reiterated that students’ participation in public day secondary schools in Makueni County particularly school attendance and completion was to a great extent affected by parents’ ability to pay such user charges. Their arguments revealed that most students were forced to miss school or classes after being send home to collect school fees while others accumulated huge fee balances which caused them to drop out of school. The failure to pay school fees on time according to the PA chairpersons was attributed majorly to lack of adequate incomes and in some cases, parents’ ignorance. Some of the PA chairpersons’ responses were recoded as follows: *“To high extent, the principals are forced to send some students home to collect schools’ fees thus causing them to miss classes”* PA Chairperson 13 ... *“To a very great extent, some students are sent home for fees until they drop out of school”* PA Chairperson 9 ... *“Very much, most parents face economic challenges in keeping their children in school”* PA Chairperson 41.. *“To a great extent, sometimes the teachers introduce meal cards so that only those that have paid take meal”* PA Chairperson 2.. *“To a high extent, most parents are not working or have very low income, no food at home and hence, payment of school fees is a problem to them”* PA Chairperson 26.. *“To a very high extent, parents pay with difficulties especially remedial fee”* PA Chairperson 29. Majority of the area chiefs, 15 (75.0%) in number, were of the view that school lunch contributions and development fees to a great extent influenced students’ participation in public day secondary schools. The larger proportion of these chiefs, 9 (45.0%) stated that uniform fees influenced students’ participation only to some

extent. The area chiefs unanimously asserted that there were some learners in their communities who left or dropped out of school before completing Form 4 due to lack of school fees. Therefore, it can generally be argued that parents' ability to pay user charges/school levies was a family-based factor that was believed to greatly influence students' participation in public day secondary schools in Makueni County by various education stakeholders.

DISCUSSION OF RESEARCH FINDINGS

Parents' Ability to Pay User Charges and Students' Participation in Schools

The study established that public day secondary schools in Makueni County charged various user charges/school levies ranging from lunch fee to teacher motivation charges. This finding is consistent with the observation that the Government of Kenya adopted a cost sharing approach where it paid capitation sent directly to schools while the rest of the cost is met by the parents/guardians as user charges, forming an extra cost incurred by the household as concluded by Wainaina (2016). According to the study results, the major user charges imposed in these schools were lunch, remedial, uniform and development fees and the amounts charged in these schools were comparable. The finding resonated well with Amuga (2016) that majority of secondary schools have all types of user charges that have pushed up cost of education. It was also observed that on average, most parents in the sampled public day secondary schools in Makueni County did not pay the relevant user charges/school levies in time and this was affirmed by the finding that in these schools, most students were frequently sent home to collect school fees, mainly more than twice per term. This state of affairs was largely linked to the low incomes or poor economic background of many of the parents and in some cases and parents' own ignorance on the need to pay the relevant user charges in time. These findings were consistent with the observations made by World Bank (2009) that the cost of education represent large percentage of total household spending and is a burdensome to some parents hence user charges can lead to exclusion of a student from school.

Parents' ability to pay user charges/school levies was perceived by the greater proportion of the respondents to influence students' enrolment, regular school attendance and completion of studies in public day secondary schools in Makueni County to a great extent. A considerable number of cases where students were unable to regularly attend school or complete their studies due to lack of school fees either by missing classes, dropping out of school or being terminated from school were reported. The findings were supported Morgan et al. (2012) observation that user charges could result to exclusion of children whose parents did not pay for school fees leading to absenteeism and non-participation in school. The correlation analysis conducted revealed a significant positive association between parents' ability to pay user charges/school levies and students' participation in public day secondary schools in Makueni County. The regression analysis further confirmed that in deed, parents' ability to pay user charges or school levies positively and in a significant way, influenced students' participation in public day secondary schools in Makueni County resulting to the rejection of the null hypothesis that parents' ability to pay user charges or school levies did not significantly influence student participation in these schools. The study therefore concluded that enhanced parents' ability to pay user charges would significantly boost students' participation in public day secondary schools in Makueni County. The findings were consistent with Wainaina (2016) conclusion that parents' ability to pay user charges significantly affected students' participation in public secondary schools in terms of daily attendance as a substantial number of students were absent from school due to fees problems while others could not complete their school work.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The study recommends that the government of Kenya through the Ministry of Education should continuous review the FDSE policy to support increased budgetary allocations so that FDSE covers some of the user

charges imposed by school heads. The also study recommends the abolishment of all the user charges imposed in public day secondary schools to enable the participation of students from poor background in school activity.

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