



PRINCIPALS' PERCEPTION OF CHALLENGES UNDERMINING EFFECTIVE IMPLEMENTATION OF FREE SECONDARY EDUCATION IN LIKUYANI SUB-COUNTY, KENYA

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Abstract:

Free Secondary Education (FSE) in Kenya was introduced in 2018 with an aim of enhancing access to secondary education in the country. This initiative however, has experienced challenges related to funding, infrastructure in schools and staffing shortages. In this regard, the study sought to examine principals' perception of the challenges with a view to determining the extent to which the challenges could be undermining effective implementation of the programme in Likuyani sub-county. The study used *ex-post facto* research design. Data was collected by use of a personally delivered questionnaire from 52 principals who were randomly selected from a total population of 60 principals in the study area. Data analysis was done using Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) programme version 20. Nominal scale data was analysed using frequency counts and percentages while ordinal scale data was analysed using t-test and ANOVA statistics. Gender of the principal had no statistically significant influence on principals' perception of the challenges undermining FSE implementation. However, years of experience had a statistically significant influence on the rating of FSE implementation challenges. The study has proffered a number of recommendation on ways in which implementation of FSE can be enhanced in the study area and by implicating other parts of the country.

Keywords: free secondary education, implementation challenges, Likuyani Sub-County, Kenya

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1. Introduction

Many countries in the world have initiated free secondary education with a view to enhancing access to this subsector of education system. This initiative has been motivated by international based agreements on the need to expand learning opportunities to children and the youth. Key among them includes the international conventions on education, for instance Jomtien, 1990, Dakar Conference, 2000 and the World Conference for Sustainable Development, 2014.

In response to these international recommendations, the government of Kenya introduced Free Secondary Education (FSE) in 2008. The FSE initiative aimed at enhancing access to secondary education and hence creates a pool of trainable human resources in post-secondary middle and higher training institutions. This move as reasoned would enable the country's to achieve its agenda of attaining middle level economy status as envisaged in the county vision 2030 (Republic of Kenya, 2007). The funding regime envisaged in the FSE programme was that the government was to allocate Ksh 10,265 to each student per annum for meeting costs relating to tuition, operation and general improvement of schools. Parents in this funding arrangement were expected to support their children by way of providing uniforms, lunches in day schools and residence cost in boarding schools (Ministry of Education, 2008).

In spite of the noble goals envisioned in the FSE initiative, the programme has been characterized by funding challenges which are likely to impact negatively in its implementation. Some of the challenges include rising cost of tuition materials and other learning related inputs such as building materials. The rising cost has the implication that the stipulated per capita allocation to students is less likely to effectively support the programme. Moreover, the FSE funds, as has been severally pointed out have been disbursed erratically by the government (Njagi & Wanja, 2014). In response to these funding challenges, some schools have forced parents to pay higher fees so as to cushion them (schools) against the rising cost of student's services. Since most parents have limited capacity to close the funding gap in their respective schools, it can be reasoned that quality education in secondary schools is likely to be compromised owing to inadequate supply of critical inputs such as learning materials (e.g., text books and teachers guides) and inability to meet the cost of water and electricity bills. This scenario may hinder full realization of the targeted learning outcomes in Kenya's secondary education system (Kiumi, Ngunjiri, Maina, 2015). This observation brings to the fore two critical questions:

- 1) How are school principals perceiving the challenges facing the effective implementation of the FSE in their institutions.
- 2) Are these perceptions related to principals gender and principalship experience?

The study set out two objectives with a view to answering the two questions. The objectives were stated as follows:

- 1) To find out whether gender has any difference on principals' perception of challenges undermining effective implementation of FSE in Likuyani Sub-County, Kenya.

- 2) To determine whether principals' experience has any influence on principal perception of challenges undermining effective implementation of FSE in Likuyani Sub-County, Kenya.

Two assumptions regarding the expected outcome of the study were made at the outset. The assumptions were stated in form of two null hypotheses which were tested at .05 alpha level. The hypotheses were stated thus;

H₀₁: Gender has no statistically significant influence on principals' perception of challenges undermining effective implementation of FSE in Likuyani Sub-County, Kenya.

H₀₂: Principals' experience has no statistically significant influence on principals' perception of challenges undermining effective implementation of FSE in Likuyani Sub-County, Kenya.

2. Methodology

The study adopted *ex-post facto* research design. This research design is applied in a situation where the independent and dependent variables have already interacted (Kerlinger, 1986). Consequently, the researcher cannot manipulate the independent variables with a view to determining their effects on the dependent variable. In this regard the result of the interaction between the independent and dependent variable is determined retrospectively. The *ex post facto* design was therefore deemed ideal for this study in view of the fact that besides data collection, the study sought to establish retrospectively the extent to which personal characteristics (gender and principals' experience) had an influence on principals' perceptions of challenges undermining effective implementation of FSE in Likuyani Sub-County.

2.1 Instrumentation

Data was collected through a questionnaire which was self-delivered to the respondents. The option to self-delivery the questionnaire was based on the reasoning it would make it possible to create rapport with the respondents and also create an opportunity to explain the purpose of the study to the respondents and also explain issues that were likely to be unclear in the instrument. This approach to data collection enhanced questionnaire response rate which was 100 percent.

The questionnaire had two sections labelled A and B. Section A gathered data on respondents gender and principalship experience while section B had 20 five-point Likert scale items on challenges undermining effective implementation of FSE. Responses in the items ranged from "strongly agree" "agree" "somewhat agree" "disagree" and "strongly disagree". Respondents were requested to put a tick mark () on the option which best described their opinion or perception for that matter.

2.2 Reliability and Validity of the Instrument

Two measures of the instrument's reliability were carried out, namely external and internal reliability. The former, which is a measure of the extent to which an instrument is capable of generating similar results when used more than once to collect data from a given sample was determined through t-test technique. This involved administration of the instrument to 16 randomly selected secondary school principals in the neighbouring Lugari Sub-county. The instrument was subsequently administered to the 16 principals after two weeks. The initial responses to the instrument were correlated with the subsequent responses which generated a coefficient of $r = 0.73$. Internal reliability which is a measure of the extent to which items in an instrument are measuring a single idea (e.g. principals' perception of challenges undermining FSE in this context) was estimated through Chronbach's alpha. The alpha obtained was 0.75. This implies that the instrument was consistent in measuring principals' perception 85% of the time and that error may have occurred only 15% of the time. The two reliability indices indicates that the instrument reliability level was high (Marczyk, Dematteo, & Festinger, 2005).

Validity is a measure of the degree to which an instrument measures what it claims or purports to measure. It is thus an estimation of the extent to which the instrument in question represents the universe or domain being investigated (Key, 2002). Estimating an instrument's validity is in this regard critical since it will make it possible to determine whether or not responses from a group of subjects can be explained with accuracy. The instrument was validated using two experts from the Department of Curriculum and Educational Management, Laikipia University and five principals in the neighbouring Lugari sub-county. The experts and principals were requested to identify items in the instrument that were not capable of generating the targeted information from the respondents. Such items were rephrased before execution of the main study.

2.3 Data Analysis

Nominal scale data- that is data on principals' gender and experience was analysed through frequency counts and percentages. Ordinal scale data (specifically responses to the Likert scale items) was analysed by use of t-test and ANOVA with a view to testing the two null hypotheses which were germane to the study.

3. Results and Discussion

Findings accruing from the study are presented in the succeeding section.

3.1 Respondents' Characteristics

This section covers respondents' bio data in terms of gender and principalship experience. This information is captured in tables one and two.

Table 1: Respondents' Gender Profile

Gender	n	%
Male	37	71
Female	15	29
Total	52	100

A look at the data summarized in table 1 show that an overwhelming majority of principals (71%) were males while 29% were females. This gender distribution profile indicates that female teachers are yet to catch up with their male colleagues in regard to securing secondary school principalship positions. Male domination (androcentricity) of educational leadership has been reported in other studies (see for example Gachoki, 2006); Ng'ang'a, 2012). This phenomenon, as has been observed by Bush (2003) is linked to the 'male' image of management in which management is conceived as a field that is less appealing to women. This perception is predicated on the belief that management demands masculine traits such as aggressiveness, domination and competition rather than feminine behavioural characteristics such as shared problem solving, negotiation, consensus building and collaboration (Alkharifa, 1992). However, Hall (1999) has observed that the association between management and masculinity has no empirical foundations.

Table 2: Distribution of Respondents by Principalship Experience

Principalship Experience (in years)	n	%
2-5	13	26
6-10	14	27
11-15	7	13
16-20	7	13
21-25	7	13
Over 25	4	8
Total	52	100

As it envisages from table 2, the highest proportion of respondents (27%) had a principalship experience ranging between 6-10 years followed by those (26%) who were in the 2-5 years of experience bracket. The least proportion of respondents (8%) had more than 25 years of principalship experience. This headship experience profile has the implication that all respondents in the study sample had adequate experience in the implementation of FSE since its inception in 2008.

4. Findings and Discussion

The first level of data analysis involved computation of mean scores from responses to the 20 five-point Likert scale items in which the maximum mean score was expected to be five while the minimum was expected to be one.

The items covered five areas relating to FSE challenges. Financing (4 items), teacher based challenges (4 items), learner related challenges (5 items), parental based

challenges (5 items) and community related challenges (3 items). A high mean score implied that the challenge in question was rated high in regard to the extent to which it was undermining effective implementation of FSE and vice versa. The mean scores are presented in table 3.

Table 3: Rating of Selected FSE Challenges

Challenge	Mean score
Financing	4.91
Teacher based challenges	4.59
Learner related challenges	4.44
Parental based challenges	4.56
Community based challenges	3.86
Total	4.47

A look at the data presented in table 3 reveals that the highest rated challenges were those related to financing of FSE following by teacher related challenges and parental based challenges. The challenges that were lowly-rated were those relating to community factors.

4.1 Hypotheses Testing

The study tested two null hypotheses. The first hypothesis was stated as follows:

H₀₁: Gender has no statistically significant influence on principals' perception of challenges undermining effective implementation of FSE in Likuyani sub-county, Kenya.

The hypothesis was tested through t-test statistics. The results of this statistical test are presented in table 4.

Table 4: Summary of t-test on Male and Female Respondents Rating of FSE Challenges

Respondents gender	n	Mean	P- value
Male	37	4.51	0.253
Female	15	4.49	
Total	52		

The data in table 4 reveals that male respondents' rating of the FSE challenges was higher than that of their female counterparts. However, the difference in mean score ratings was not statistically significant. Consequently, the first hypothesis was accepted and conclusion made that gender and rating of FES challenges were statistically independent. The second null hypothesis was stated thus:

H₀₂: Principals experience has no statistically significant influence on principals' perception of challenges undermining effective implementation of FSE in Likuyani Sub-county, Kenya.

The hypothesis was tested through ANOVA statistics. The results are presented here in below in table 5.

**Table 5: ANOVA Summary of Respondents' Rating of
 FSE Challenges by Principals' Experience**

Experience (in years)	n	Mean score	F-value	P-value
2-5	13	4.15	1.706	.002
6-10	4	4.34		
11-15	7	4.19		
16-20	7	4.46		
21-25	7	4.57		
Over 25	4	3.54		
Total	52	4.20		

An examination of the data in table 5 reveals that the highest rating of the selected FSE challenges was by principals in the 21-25 year of experience bracket followed by their counterparts in the 16-20 years of experience and those who had been in principals' position for a period ranging between 6-10 years. The table also shows that the lowest rating of the FSE challenges was by principals who had an experience exceeding 25 years. The table further shows that the computed p - value ($p=.002$) was lower than the set probability value of .005. In this regard, the second hypothesis was accepted and conclusion made that years of principals' experience and rating of FSE challenges were not statistically independent.

5. Summary of the Findings and Conclusions

The highest rating of FSE challenges was those relating to financing of the programme and teacher based challenges while the lowest rating was those relating to community based factors.

Principals' gender had no statistically significance influence on principals' perception of the challenges undermining effective implementation of FSE. However, the rating of the challenges by male principals was relatively higher than that of their female colleagues.

Principals' experience had a statistically significant influence on principals' perception of the factors undermining FSE implementation challenges. The highest rating was by principals in the 21-25 experience brackets while the lowest rating was by principals whose experience exceeded 25 years.

Based on the foregoing findings it can be concluded that financing and teacher related challenges (e.g., shortage of teachers) are risk factors to effective implementation of FSE.

5.1 Recommendations

Findings generated by the study have important implications and lessons in regard to FSE implementation. A major observation is that the government through the Ministry of Education and Teachers Service Commission should address funding and teacher supply issues in secondary schools. Second, there is a need for school principals to utilize other alternative FSE funding sources in particular Constituency Development Fund (CDF) and initiation of income generating activities. Third, studies should be carried out to establish why male principals and those in the 21-25 years of experience bracket tended to rate the selected FSE challenges at a higher level compared with female principals and those in other years of experience brackets respectively.

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