

EFFECTS OF LEVIES ON COMPLETION OF SECONDARY EDUCATION IN PUBLIC SECONDARY DAY SCHOOLS WITHIN KAKA MEGA EAST SUB-COUNTY, KENYA

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ABSTRACT

Despite various government interventions to lower the cost of education and increase completion of secondary education, the ideal situation is yet to be realized. With a quarter of enrolled students dropping out before completing secondary education, Kaka mega East Sub-county lags far behind the UNESCO projected dropout out rate of just 5 %. The scenario persists despite having the largest number of relatively low cost public day secondary schools established ostensibly to increase completion rates. The purpose of the study was to establish the effect of school levies on completion of secondary. The study utilized a descriptive research design with the survey method. The sample comprised of 17 school Principals, 21 Form Four class teachers, 47 parents, 450 Form Four students and one SCDE. Systematic random sampling and purposive sampling techniques were used to select respondents. Questionnaires, interview schedules, Focus Group Discussions and documentary analysis were used to collect data whose validity was ascertained through triangulation strategies. The study findings indicate high non-completion still persists in public day secondary schools in Kaka mega East Sub-County due to school levies. Comparatively, the lunch and infrastructure development levies contributed a substantial 79.4 % of the total cost of school levies.

KEYWORDS: *Levies, Completion, Education, Public Day Secondary Schools*

Article History

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INTRODUCTION

BACKGROUND

School levies refer to any form of monetary contribution paid by a person or an organization in relation to the attendance by a student in any programme of a public school. If the levies are not paid when they become due, the school reserves the right to suspend the student's participation. Levies are charged by the school in exchange for the services it provides (Law-Insider, 2019). The user fees in secondary education constituted a barrier to attainment of SDG 4 (Ohba, 2009). The first target of SDG4 was to ensure that all students of secondary school age complete free quality secondary education by the year 2030 (Khrshee, 2018). The global target for EFA was the year 2015 with a 95 % completion rate at secondary level (UN, 2016). However, the world failed to meet the target, for instance, by end of 2015; 65 million adolescents of lower secondary age were out of school mainly due to the inability to fund various costs of education. According to survey data from 63 low- and middle-income countries in 2012, children from the poorest 20 per cent of households were four times as likely to be out of school compared to children from the richest households (UN, 2016). The failure to complete secondary education was linked to socio-economic

settings, poverty and national policy (Obonyo, 2013).

In Asia, Japan attained the EFA completion rate of 94 %, almost five years before the global target of 2015 (Mikiewicz, 2010). However, a 2013 survey by the Ministry of Education revealed that over 80,000 students had dropped out of lower secondary level due to the inability to pay tuition fees. A further 70,000 students had exited temporarily while those who paid tuition fees late increased by over 10,000 (Japan Times, 2018). The completion rates in European Union varied across member states. Germany achieved the EU completion rate of 90 % before the 2015 target mainly due to support from the Education and Participation Package of 2011. Families of students from poor households benefitted from supplementary child allowance, lunch subsidies in day schools and payment of subscription to co-curricular activities. Local governments funded needy students within their areas of jurisdiction (Eurydice, 2016). In the USA, by 2015, the completion rate for grades 9 to 13 in public schools stood at 91 %, which was four percentage points below the EFA target of 95 % (Stark & Noel, 2015). Majority of secondary level dropouts emanated from communities of high levels of poverty (Rumberger, 2011). In the USA, increased completion rates at secondary level were attained through various approaches (Messacar & Oreopoulos, 2012). Financial support was given towards fees, course materials and transport (Lamb & Rice, 2008) while poor households received income tax credits and affordable housing (Dianda, 2008).

In China, the probability of completing secondary education is closely associated with economic background. As Lewin (2011) observes, “The richest 20 % of children are almost all enrolled up to the age of eighteen years or so, whereas nearly half of the poorest 20 % drop out of school at the age of 15 years or below” (Lewin, 2011). To reduce school costs and increase completion, the government of China increased expenditure on junior secondary education, eliminated tuition fees and provided free textbooks (Lewin *et al*, 2011).

Developing countries in the world missed the basic education EFA 2015 targets by a big margin due to setting over-ambitious goals. The countries set to achieve EFA targets in 15 years, a goal that was achieved by developed countries in 100 years (Clemens & Moss, 2015). Despite the substantial gains made towards achieving inclusive and equitable quality education, Sub-Saharan Africa and Southern Asia accounted for over 70 % of out of school population (UNDP, 2017). The high cost of secondary education was a contributing factor to non-completion of secondary education. Children withdrew from school due to lack of resources to pay the costs of schooling (Akyempong *et al* 2007). In Egypt, approximately 54 % of students who did not attend school regularly cited economic barriers such as poverty among other reasons (UNICEF, 2016). Children who attended school irregularly in Ethiopia and Guinea could not afford exercise books, pens, uniforms, textbooks and registration payments (UNICEF, 2012). In Kenya, school costs constituted a barrier to initial enrolment and participation by the poor (UNESCO, 2012). The low primary to secondary transition rate of 49 % in the year 2009 was attributed to costly school fees and low household income (Glennerster, Kremier, Mbiti, & Takavasha, 2011). The problem of prohibitive secondary school costs partly emanated from economic recession in the 1980s, a period of World Bank initiated Structural Adjustment Programmes. The period resulted into reduced funding for the education sector. The consequent cost sharing policy led to introduction of user fees in secondary education. It resulted into higher cost of secondary education, reduced access, retention and completion (Ayodo *et al*, 2002). Limited access to secondary education was amplified by launching of FPE in 2003 in line with global timelines of EFA targets (Ohba, 2009). The primary school net enrolment rose by over 1.2 million but access to secondary education was still limited by high fees (King'ori, 2015).

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The government of Kenya introduced free secondary education in 2008 as a major step towards education for all. In Kaka mega County the GER increased by 23 %, the average primary to secondary transition rate increased at the national level from 72.5 % in 2011 to 73.3 % in 2012 (MoEST, 2017). However, GER declined in Kaka Mega County from 75 % to 56 %, by nineteen percentage points within a year. Consequently, there were 74,000 out-of-school children by 2015, the target for 95 % completion rate (KCTF, 2014). More than a decade after introduction of FSE in Kenya, the problem of high non-completion rates still persists in Kaka mega East Sub-county (MoEST, 2017). This study seeks to establish the effect of school levies on completion of secondary school education.

METHODOLOGY

The study utilized a descriptive research design using the survey method. The approach allowed for collection of quantitative and qualitative data which complemented each other to produce a holistic picture of the phenomenon under study (Bulsara, 2009). The target population consisted of 35 school Principals, 35 teachers, 35 parents and 1787 Form Four students. The study respondents comprised a sample of 17 school Principals, 21 Form Four class teachers, 47 parents, 450 Form Four students and one Sub- County Director of Education (SCDE). Two sampling techniques were used: systematic random sampling and purposive sampling. The schools were selected using the systematic random sampling technique from a list of all public day secondary schools in Kaka mega East Sub-county. Even items were picked until the list attained 17 schools. As Getu & Tegbar (2006) observe, the element of randomness reduces researcher bias in the selection of the cases.

After identification of the schools, they became sites from which the respondents were picked, namely: 17 school Principals, 21 Form Four class teachers, 47 parents and 450 Form Four students. Purposive sampling was used to select parents/guardians for the study. They were parents of students with huge fees arrears (from fees register) and high frequency of absenteeism (from class registers). The class teachers were sampled purposively due to their access to students' data on daily school attendance and completion. They also assisted to identify respondents among the students. The Form Four students who were picked purposively had enrolled in year one but had high frequency of absenteeism and high fee arrears. Purposive selection of the Principals was based on the information that they implemented government policy on free secondary education. The Sub-County Director of Education (SCDE) was also selected purposively due to the responsibility of overall supervision and implementation agent on behalf of the MoE whose goal was to enhance completion.

Questionnaires, interview schedules, Focus Group Discussions and documentary analysis were used to collect data.

FINDINGS

Amount of Fees Paid Per Year

The study sought to establish the total amount of fees that parents paid per year per enrolled student. The data was obtained from two sources: interviews with parents and documentary analysis of fees structures. The findings from field work are illustrated in Table 1.

The findings in Table 1 show that a majority of the parents (88.6 %) in the sample paid more than Kshs 10,000 (USD 100) per year to support secondary education. The levies were paid in three installments spread over three terms from January to December.

Table 1: Amount of Fees Paid Per Year per Student

Amount of Fees (Kshs)	US Dollars	No. of Parents	Percentage (%)
8,000–9,900	80-99	8	11.4 %
10,000–11,900	100-119	28	40.0 %
12,000–13,900	120-139	21	30.0 %
14,000 and above	140 and above	13	18.6 %

Source: Fieldwork, 2018

Forms of School Levies

This study sought data on the forms of school levies from two primary sources: students' focus group discussions and interviews with school Principals. The findings were complemented by documentary analysis of admission letters and termly newsletters. The findings are presented in Table 2.

The findings in Table 2 show that parents paid seven forms of school levies to support secondary education. Analysis in form of percentages aided the study to establish the contribution of each levy to the annual fees.

Table 2: Forms of School Levies

Form of Levy	Average Cost per Year (Kshs)	US Dollars (US\$)	Percentage of Annual Fees (%)
Lunch	8425	84.25	66.8 %
Infrastructure development	2000	20	15.9 %
Central Activity Fund	775	7.75	6.1 %
SMASSE	300	3	2.4 %
Computer levy	300	3	2.4 %
Educational Improvement Fund	300	3	2.4 %
Caution Money	500	5	4.0 %
Average Annual Fees	12600	126	100.00 %

Source: Fieldwork, 2018

Lunch Levy

The lunch levy constituted the biggest percentage, over two thirds (66.8 %) of annual school levies. This money was paid by parents for the purpose of students taking meals at school during the tea and lunch breaks. Principals gave several reasons for introduction of lunch levy in the sampled day secondary schools, which included economic and logistical concerns. Through a semi-structured interview, one of the school Principals stated:

Taking lunch at school saves on cost and time. It solves the problem of different reporting times after lunch due to variations in distances covered by day scholars. A figure of around Kshs 6000, it translates only Kshs 30 per day for lunch which is cheaper for both the parent and the school (Male Principal).

Apparently, the cost of the lunch levy was influenced by diet choices, stakeholders' input and the economic situation. One respondent among the Principals argued:

The community around here is poor; the lunch per year is around Kshs7,000. The students' lunch comprises of a basic menu of strong tea during the tea break at 10:30 am then at lunch they eat a mixture of maize and beans (Female Parent).

Further comparison on the lunch levy was clarified by another discussant among the parents. The respondent opined:

As parents of this school, we discussed and agreed to provide bread at tea break to be taken with the tea, the children take rice and beef or beef and *ugali* once a week besides the normal menu of *githeri* that is why in a year we pay over Kshs 12,000 for lunch (Female Parent).

Although taking lunch at school had the positive effect of saving time on the part of the day scholars, it also affected students negatively because it constituted an additional financial burden on the households. Presently, there is no existing policy guide from MoE on the amount to be charged for the lunch levy. This finding agrees with that of the World Feeding Program Organization (2013) that community initiated feeding programs tend to be cost effective because they are needs-based and locally designed with strong community ownership and participation.

Despite the cost of the feeding program, it plays a positive role of increasing students' access to learning besides improving their nutrition status.

Infrastructure Development Levy

Further, the findings in Table 2 indicate that the levy for development of physical facilities contributed 15.9 percent of the school levies across the seventeen study sites. The levy is part of the obligations of parents and host communities under the FSE arrangement. One Principal affirmed in an interview:

In the Free Secondary Education arrangement, households and communities put up physical facilities while the government only funds the maintenance of the already constructed facilities. We are just complying with the government policy in order to provide adequate learning facilities in day schools that are not physically endowed (Female Principal).

Therefore, schools charged the development levy in order to increase physical facilities whereas local factors affected the amount of money that was charged in the schools. Through an interview, one school Principal explained:

The revenue for infrastructure development is pegged on enrolment; this school has a high enrolment of over 500 students. Therefore the BOM is able to collect more money for a project without over burdening the parents. That is why the BOM fixed a low figure of Kshs 500 below what other schools charge (Male Principal).

An interview with the Sub-County Director of Education revealed that the government complemented parents' efforts:

One public day secondary school received 10 million as a Centre of Excellence. In the year 2015, three day schools received MoE infrastructure funding. One school received Kshs. 16 million for construction of a tuition block, offices and sanitation facilities. Two other schools received Kshs. 5 million and one million respectively for construction of classrooms. However, the condition is that the school must write a proposal to the Ministry in order to be considered for funding (SCDE).

As a result, two parameters greatly influenced the cost of education via reduction of the infrastructure levy contribution. This include: economies of scale through large enrolment and government intervention through the MoE infrastructure support. Consequently, the government infrastructure support and high student enrolment had a positive impact on completion of secondary education. Schools with low enrolment sought permission from the County Education Board to charge higher levies in order to realize sufficient revenue within a period of five years or less. This finding closely follows the conclusion of Masheti (2015) that paying for infrastructure development negatively affects students' completion of secondary education given that the construction of physical facilities is capital intensive and long term.

Therefore, poor households strain to sustain a student in secondary school because the levy is collected throughout the four-year cycle of secondary education.

Central Activity Fund (CAF), Education Improvement Fund (EIF), Strengthening of Mathematics and Science in Secondary Education (SMASSE) and caution money levies

The levies in the categories of CAF, EIF, SMASSE and caution money are standardized by the County Education Board. As a result, the cost of CAF, EIF, SMASSE and caution money was constant across all the schools in the sample (Odhiambo, 2018). Three levies, CAF, SMASSE and EIF are collected by schools and forwarded to the Sub-County Education Office to support education programs while caution money was retained at school. The findings confirmed that public day schools in Kaka mega East complied with the MOE regulation on the maximum value of the levies of CAF, EIF and caution money.

Computer Maintenance Levy

Less than a quarter of the target schools (23.5 %) charged the computer maintenance levy compared to 76.5 percent of the schools which did not charge. The levy was used for repair and maintenance of the computers. It was evident that some schools faced a challenge in trying to expand career opportunities for students in the areas of Information and Communications Technology (ICT). Introduction of Computer Studies in some schools had the dual but opposite effects, a Principal observed:

The school benefitted from the government Economic Stimulus Package in the year 2012. We received 11 computers, one projector, one laptop and one printer for integration of ICT in teaching and learning. The levy is used for repair and maintenance of the machines besides expanding the curriculum offered in the Technical and Applied areas (Male Principal).

Although the introduction of computer studies expanded the curriculum in technical subjects, it raised the cost of secondary education due to additional funds that parents paid to maintain the computer systems. This finding agrees with the conclusion of Suryani (2010) that introduction of ICT in schools has numerous benefits for students' career prospects. However, the cost of maintaining the computer systems impedes sustainability of ICT benefits among schools with limited financial capacity.

Levies Paid by Form 4 Students

According to documentary analysis of the newsletters at the end of the academic year, form 4 students paid two main levies as communicated by one of the school Principals:

The Form Four students are required to pay the KNEC registration fee for the Form Four national examinations (KCSE) before the end of March and the Kenya Universities and Colleges Central Placement Service (KUCCPS) levy for placement into careers between the months of October and January of the subsequent year (Female Principal).

Analysis of the KNEC registration nominal rolls revealed that the Form Four students (2014-2016) incurred additional costs of Kshs (5600 – 6200) for the KNEC fees and Kshs 500 to Kshs 600 for KUCCPS. An interview with one of the parents revealed the effects of the two levies on completion of secondary:

A student is not allowed to sit for the KCSE examination without paying KNEC fees in full before March of the examination year. One is forced to wait for the subsequent year besides paying all the school levies in addition to the

KNEC fees. Therefore, students who cannot raise the KNEC fees dropped out of school due to the high cost implications on poor households (Male Parent).

On the same note, one of the school Principals quoted communication from KNEC on the instructions of registration of candidates for the KCSE national examinations:

Any entries submitted to the Kenya National Examinations Council after the 30th March of every year will not be accepted under any circumstances irrespective of when the money was deposited into the bank account (Male Principal)

The discussion confirmed that the KNEC registration fee was one of the biggest impediments to secondary school completion. It was mandatory and payable by the month of March before a student was allowed to continue attending school. Consequently, failure to pay the KNEC fees had adverse implications such as absenteeism, repetition or even dropout. Also, the implementation of the KNEC deadline of 30th March ended up disadvantaging the students who were the main beneficiaries of secondary school education. With regard to the KUCCPS levy paid by Form Four students (November-January), the findings revealed that KUCCPS levies did not have any impact on completion of secondary education. Similarly, students felt that the KUCCPS application was flexible and voluntary. Hence, it did not contribute to non-completion because it could be done later outside school after receipt of the KCSE results. The conclusions of this study agree with those of Grenzke (2010), who argued that payment of user items in stages at specific classes had minimal impact on completion. The gradual acquisition enabled poor families to source items comfortably unlike some levies which required payment upfront before the student was allowed into school.

Effects of School Levies

The respondents among the students, parents and teachers were requested to state the effect of the school levies. The findings from focus group discussions, interviews and questionnaires are presented in Figure 1.

Findings in Figure 1 indicate that school levies had three major effects: repetition, absenteeism and dropout. They show that a majority of the students (53.9 %) and a majority of the parents (51.7 %) ranked absenteeism as the top effect of school levies followed by dropout at 37.8 % among students and 39.1 % among parents. Comparatively, a majority of the teachers (50.1 %) ranked dropout as the biggest effect of school levies followed by absenteeism at 38.3 %. Among the three categories of respondents repetition was ranked last among the effects of levies. On average, the results show that absenteeism was the biggest effect of school levies (48.0 %) while class repetition was the lowest effect (9.7 %) in public day secondary schools. One of the interviewed respondents among the teachers surmised the situation:

The charge of school levies has led to a continuous drop of the number of students in the subsequent classes. Therefore, every year the Form Four class always has a lower enrolment than the other classes (Female Teacher).

From Figure 1, repetition had been minimized although some students had repeated the Form Four class due to failure to pay KNEC levies on time. The low number of repeaters was attributed to compliance with government policy which had outlawed repetition. Also, school levies had the effect of students missing some lessons especially during the end of the month for failure to pay school levies. Through an interview one of the parents observed that:

The demand for levies has ensured that some students are out of school for the better part of the term. Also, some students do not sit for their internal examination which is very demoralizing; the frustration causes some to terminate their studies (Male Parent).

Interviews with parents and students revealed that the lunch levy had the biggest effect on school participation. It caused frequent absenteeism from school and even dropout when the parents failed to pay up the lunch levy on time. These findings concur with the results of a study in Kikuyu Sub-County. The lunch levy was a major contributor to absenteeism and dropout due to high frequency of being sent home to collect money for school meals (Kingori, 2015). According to the class teachers, potential dropout cases demonstrated some economic indicators during enrolment, for instance, seeking of external support, erratic payment of levies and inadequate school supplies. The following quotations illustrate the point:

Potential dropout cases mainly emanate from poor households. The parents carry bursary forms to be completed immediately after gaining admission into school and being assigned an admission number (Male Principal).

On the same note, another Principal observed, such cases join Form One beyond the deadline, with an amount less than a quarter of the fees for the First Term. Some report with old uniform and textbooks borrowed from former students. They begin to withdraw from school at small intervals followed by frequent and prolonged absenteeism as fees arrears increase with time, finally dropout takes place (Male Principal).

The foregoing dialogue implied that absenteeism was a precursor to dropout and had detectable signs which could be discerned upon admission into the school. The indicators of absenteeism were shared by dropout, such as: huge fees arrears, irregular school attendance and prolonged periods of absenteeism from school. Finally, poverty was a major cause of failure to pay levies which then led to non-completion of secondary school education despite the government intervention of subsidizing school costs. These findings concur with those of Kinaro (2015) and Musangi (2017) who emphasized that school levies influenced completion of secondary school education. Students from poor backgrounds had a higher risk of dropping out due to the additional costs of education.

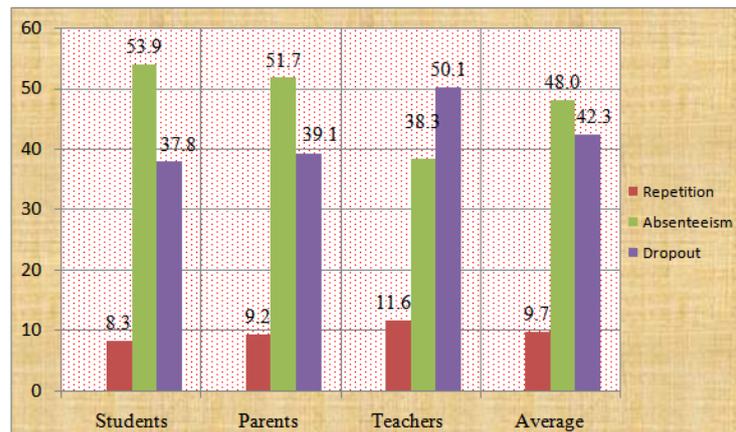


Figure 1: Respondents' Perception of the Effects of Levies
 Source: Fieldwork, 2018

Data on Completion Rates

This study sought on completion rates data using two approaches: documentary analysis (attendance & fees registers) and class teachers' questionnaires. The teachers provided statistics on: number of students who enrolled in Form One year 2014 and the number of students who completed Form Four 2017 (gross Form 4 completion). Finally, the class teachers provided data on the number of dropouts from the group that enrolled in Form One (year 2014) and the average fees arrears of the students who dropped out. Caution was taken to remove data of new students who joined the 2014-2017 class in the subsequent classes of Form Two, Form Three and Form Four. Hence, in this study, the Form 4 net completion in 2017

refers to the total number of students who accessed Form One in 2014 and graduated at Form Four level in the sampled schools. The data was analyzed using percentages as presented in Table 3.

Table 3 shows that Form One enrolment in the sample was 1398 students in the year 2014 while the completion rate was 72.1 percent, four years later in 2017. The population of non-completion in the cohort was 27.3 % in 2017 among the schools in the sample. The findings were supported by some excerpts from the school newsletters. In one of the letters, a Principal gave the following communication:

This year, fees payment has been a major challenge in accomplishing many of the school programmes especially lunch and personal emoluments. Payment of levies was the poorest this year with total fees arrears of Kshs551, 387 for the year 2017 alone. Most of our programmes stalled because of fees arrears (Male Principal)

On the Same Note, the Educational Officer stated the Following;

It is not possible that the students who left the public day schools attempted to continue with education in the boarding or private schools with higher schooling costs after failing to pay the cheaper levies in public day schools. In the absence of a cheaper option, such students dropped out (SCDE)

The foregoing dialogue implies that more than a quarter of the 2014-2017 cohort failed to complete secondary education in Kaka mega East due to the high cost of schooling as evidenced in the huge fees arrears in public day schools, the cheapest category of schools in Kaka mega East Sub-County. The foregoing findings concur with a related study by Williams (2013) in Rwanda where households still incur huge expenses under the free education programmes. The related costs were likely to inhibit completion of secondary education.

Table 3: Students’ Completion Rate 2017

	Number	Percentage
Form 1 enrolment January 2014	1398	100.0 %
Number of students admitted in Form 2, Form 3 & Form 4 (new comers)	140	10.0 %
Total Form 4 completion 2017 including newcomers	1530	109.4 %
Dropouts from initial Form 1 enrolment 2014	383	27.3 %
Form 4 completion rate November 2017 of the initial Form 1 2014 enrolment. (excluding newcomers in Form 2, Form 3 & Form 4)	1010	72.1 %
Average Fees Arrears of Sample	2,435,159	

Source: Fieldwork, 2018

CONCLUSIONS OF THE STUDY

School levies contributed to non-completion of secondary education in public day secondary schools in Kaka mega East Sub-County despite the several interventions by public and private benefactors. Comparatively, the lunch and Parents’ Association levies contributed over three quarters of the total cost of school levies. As a result, the non-completion rate in Kaka mega east was still higher than the EFA target.

RECOMMENDATIONS

One, the Ministry of Education should come up with a policy on funding construction of physical facilities in day schools where these are inadequate. To address the limitation of FSE, funding of RMI should not be based on school enrolment. Instead, RMI funding should be based on the needs of the school, so that schools with severe shortage of physical facilities get priority. The resultant cost reduction on household contribution towards physical infrastructure would translate to better completion rates in day schools.

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