**INFLUENCE OF FEE-FREE EDUCATION ON PARENTAL AND COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION IN PRIMARY SCHOOL ACTIVITIES INSONGEA MUNICIPALITY, TANZANIA**

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**A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULLFILMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF MASTER OF EDUCATION IN ADMINISTRATION, PLANNING AND POLICY STUDIES (MED-APPS)**

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# CERTIFICATION

The undersigned, certifies that he has read and hereby recommends for acceptance by the Open University of Tanzania, a dissertation entitled; “Influence of Fee-Free Education on Parental and Community Participation in Primary School Activities in Songea Municipality, Tanzania” in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the award of the degree of Master of Education in Administration, Planning and Policy Studies.

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# DEDICATION

I dedicate this dissertation to my parents, Mr. Joseph Uvambe and Magdalena Kaduma for laying a strong academic foundation upon which I am enjoying the fruits now. The work is also dedicated to my husband Robert Fredy Mpiluka and my children Sara, Tina, Japhet and Furaha for their warmth, love, support, prayers, encouragement and tolerance throughout my entire academic pursuits. Everything they did strengthened me by shading light in my academic endeavour.

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Lastly, I am indebted to all head teachers, teachers, and parents in the selected primary schools and the ward education officer for the cooperation they accorded me especially on the data they provided which made my work a success.

# ABSTRACT

This study aimed at exploring the influence of fee-free education on parental and community participation in primary school activities. The study was guided by two specific objectives namely: to determine the influence of fee-free education in school-related activities and to explore the views of parents regarding their participation in school activities in the context of fee-free education. It was conducted in three public primary schools in Songea Municipality. The study was a qualitative and quantitative approach in some areas. It employed a survey study design. A total sample size of 31 participants was employed. Data collection methods were interviews, FGDs, and documentary reviews. Data gathered were analysed using the content analysis approach with the aid of 1994 Miles and Huber man’s framework for qualitative data analysis. The study found that FFEP resulted in a significant reduction in parental participation in school activities. Consequently, parents started attending poorly school meetings and had a low spirit in volunteering for school development projects. It was also found that parents had mixed feelings regarding their participation in primary school activities in the context of FFEP. The study suggested that Free education should actually be free; otherwise, the government should specify what parents should contribute. It was recommended that the Ministry of Education Science and Technology need to emphasize public awareness about free education in order to reduce misunderstanding within the community. Finally, further studies can be done to establish an engaging model that motivates and attracts parents’ participation in school issues.

Keywords: *Fee-Free Education, Parental, Community Primary School.*

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**LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS**

EFA Education for All

ETP Education and Training Policy

FBE Free Basic Education

FCUBE Free Compulsory Basic Education

FFBE Fee Free Basic Education

FPE Free Primary Education

ICESCR International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights

IMF International Monetary Fund

NSGRP National Strategy for Growth and Reduction of Poverty

PEDP Primary Education Development Plan

SADC Southern African Development Community

UDHR Universal Declaration of Human Rights

UNESCO United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization

UNICEF United Nations International Children’s Emergency Fund

UPE Universal Primary Education

URT United Republic of Tanzania

# CHAPTER ONE

# INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND TO THE PROBLEM

## 1.1 Introduction

This chapter sets the context of the problem which was investigated by this study. The chapter discusses nine aspects: the background to the problem, statement of the problem, objectives of the study, research questions and significance of the study. Others are the explanations on the delimitations and limitations of the study, definition of key terms used, summary of the chapter, and the organization of the dissertation.

## 1.2 Background to the Problem

Basic Education is the right of every individual irrespective of age, colour, sex, tribe, or group affiliation one belongs to. This is due to the fact that education underscores its important role such that it is a strategic agent for mindset transformation as it equips an individual with abilities to manipulate his/her surroundings to live independently (Mlaki, 2014; Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, 2015).

Basic education to an individual involves the development of competencies, knowledge, attitude and values as a basis for his/her lifelong learning (Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, 2015). For that reason, access to basic education cannot be overemphasized. It is evident that even Education for All (EFA) principles strives to bring the benefits of education to every citizen in every society against the backdrop of inequality and vulnerability caused by disability, ethnicity, language, displacement, the impact of natural disasters, and rural residence (World Bank, 2014).

In the effort to ensure that every child accesses education, world governments made concerted efforts to make basic primary education free. Free education allows pupils to get education without having to pay fees and other contributions that were previously provided by parents or guardians (Mbawala, 2017). With free education, the cost of education is carried by the government or charitable organizations. Parents’ roles are limited to meeting necessary requirements of their children including textbooks, uniforms, meals and school operational charges (Haki Elimu, 2017).

The main reason for abolishing school fees was to enable children from poor families to attend school. The argument for abolishing school fees is straightforward. School fees and other direct costs that households must bear represent a significant obstacle to enrolment, especially for the poorest and most vulnerable children. Abolishing school fees, the argument continues, will make it easier and less costly for these children to enrol in school, thus accelerating progress towards the achievement of EFA goals. School fees are a significant obstacle to enrolment for many households, and removing this obstacle invariably leads to a dramatic increase in the number of children in school.

Indeed, one of the most visible influences of fee-free education was the surge in enrolment in standard one. At the pre-primary school level, the total enrolment increased from 1,069,823 in 2015 to 1,562,770 in 2016 an increase of 46%. Nationally, 2016 standard one enrolment rose by 38.4 percent over the standard one enrolment in 2015.Standard One enrolment in 2016 was 2,120,667 compared to 1,531,746 in 2015 (TAMISEMI website-Open data). This huge rise in enrolment was slightly lower than the rise in 2001 when fees were abolished when PEDP was launched. In 2002, the first year of PEDP, Standard One enrolment was1, 632,141 compared to1, 140,554 in 2001, an increase of 43.1 percent. (Data on enrolment from tamisemi.go.tz/BEMIS-DASH BOARD) Increases in Standard One enrolment in 2016 can be partly attributed to the abolition of school fees and it is partly a result of the implementation of the new education policy.

According to the new education policy, the age for enrolling in Standard One was reduced from seven to six (URT: 2014, 24). The increase in Standard One enrolment was also partly due to younger children joining Standard One. In the past year, there were students who did not join secondary schools or dropped out because their parents could not afford to pay fees. The abolition of fees would increase the chances of children from poor families joining secondary schools if they get selected.

It should be noted that campaigns to policies in favour of free education were by to a great extent spearheaded by the realization of user fees and other mandatory contributions as a pervasive obstacle to primary school enrolment and completion for millions of children worldwide (Kattan, 2006).UNESCO (2015) indicated that 58 million children were out-of-school in 2012 due to charges which were still prevalent in schools. For instance, parents in Indonesia, China and many African countries cite user fees as a major obstacle to enrolling their children in schools (Kattan, 2006).

Dropout rates were also high in schools and were caused by parents’ non-payment of school fees for their children. In 32 countries, mostly in sub-Saharan Africa, at least 20% of children enrolled in schools are not expected to reach the last grade (UNESCO, 2015). This presents a danger that one in six children in low and middle-income countries or almost 100 million children will not have completed primary school.

Tanzania attempted to offer free education in 1963 (Haki Elimu, 2017). The purpose was to reduce enrolment disparity between children from rich and poor households. In this respect, the government took the burden of financing education system and provided free primary education. The abolition of school fees (in Tanzania) for basic education was re-featured in 2002 as a response to problems of the cost-sharing policy of 1995. During this time, the country implemented Primary Education Development Plan (PEDP). The PEDP had three phases – 2002-2006; 2007-2011; and 2012-2016 (Daven, 2008; Kalindo, 2015).

PEDP aimed at improving primary education by ensuring that girls and boys from rich and poor families and children with disabilities were not left out. The PEDP’s goals were to improve mark and equity in primary education, improve retention in the seven years of primary education and build school capacity (World Bank, 2011; Dennis & Stahley, 2012). This suggests that PEDP had an intention to reach all children in the country in order to improve access to primary education.

In order to ensure that no child is denied access to school, the government made primary education free by abolishing all school fees and compulsory cash contributions (Daven, 2008; Dennis & Stahley, 2012). It can be argued that the abolition of school fees and all other mandatory contributions was a government’s strategy to expand enrolment in primary education (Rakeshi & Omondi, 2003; Dennis & Stahley, 2012).

Despite the fact that removing school fees reduces a significant burden on poor families, butit has also adverse effect on parents and community participation (Haki Elimu, 2017). According to Kattan (2006) and World Bank and UNICEF (2009) a wide range of challenges within the context of abolishing school fees are evident. Kattan (2006) raises an argument that although the abolition of school fees has many promising outcomes, it has some challenges including the decrease of parental participation. Similarly, reporting the lessons of abolishing school fees in Africa, the World Bank and UNICEF (2009) mentioned the issues of parents and community participation as a major challenge that must be confronted with great urgency.This emphasis was among the reasons which encouraged the current researcher to conduct this study.

## 1.3 Statement of the Problem

Since 2002, Tanzania eliminated school fees for primary education to cater for enrolment expansion and improvement of completion rates in primary education (Rakeshi & Omondi, 2003). This elimination was effected through the country’s implementation of Primary Education Development Plan (PEDP). In 2014, a new Education and Training Policy (ETP) was issued to guide the provision of education in the country after the Education and Training Policy of 1995(Joseph, 2014).

The enforcement of ETP 2014 was enhanced by issuance of Educational Circulars no.5 and no.6 of 2015 and 2016 respectively (The United Republic of Tanzania, 2015;TheUnited Republic of Tanzania, 2016). The circulars, apart from eliminating school fees, they banned all other mandatory parental contributions to ensure that basic education was totally free and compulsory by attendance. The abolition of school fees and parental contributions in primary schools are reported to have many promising outcomes on enrolments and completions. However, they have been reported to have also some challenges including the decrease of parental participation (The World Bank, 2009; Joseph, 2014).

Available literature (Kattan, 2006; World Bank and UNICEF, 2009; Joseph, 2014; Haki Elimu, 2017) considers parents and community participation as the concerns that require special attention. For instance, while investigating the influence of free education policy on basic education in seven districts (Korogwe, Muleba, Tabora Urban, Njombe, Mpwapwa, Sumbawanga and Kilosa) of Tanzania, Haki Elimu (2017) mentioned the issue of poor parent participation.

The study by Joseph (2014) on factors hindering parents’ participation in school activities in secondary schools in the Arusha district established that Primary Education Development Plan (PEDP) policy did not show clearly how parents’ participation in education activities should be. Kattan’s survey on the implementation of free basic education policy is not specific to Tanzania, it covered eleven countries. All these literatures mentioned the challenge of parents and community participation as a salient feature within the context of free education.

The availability of these few studies suggests that the influence of free education on parental and community participation in school activities is not extensively researched in Tanzania; there was no research known to the researcher that had studied the same in Songea Municipality, and particularly in primary schools. Arguably, with the current move to free education, investigating the relationship between the abolition of school fees and other mandatory contributions and participation of parents and community in school-related activities becomes worth doing. This study, therefore, investigated the influence of fee-free education on parental and community participation in primary school activities in Songea Municipality, Tanzania.

## 1.4 Research Objectives

The main objective of this study was to explore the influence of fee-free education on parental and community participation in primary school activities.

# 1.5 Specific Research Objectives

The study was guided by the following research objectives:

1. To determine the influence of fee-free education in school-related activities.
2. To explore the views of parental and community members regarding their participation in school activities in the context of fee free education.

## 1.6 Research Questions

The current study strived to answer the following questions:

1. What are the influence of fee free education on parental and community participation in school related activities?
2. How do parents view their participation in primary school activities in the context of fee-free education?

## 1.7 Significance of the Study

The findings of this study are expected to raise awareness and insights to the educational authorities and teachers regarding the specific consequences of abolishing school fees and parental contributions on parental and community participation in school-related activities. This may help to design appropriate interventions to enhance effective parental and community participation of parents and community in school activities.

The findings of this study are also expected to establish awareness to policymakers on parents’ conceptualization of free basic education policy in relation to their participation in school-related activities. Research on the influence of free education on parental and community participation in primary school activities in Tanzania is scarce. Hence, the findings of this study are expected to add to this body of knowledge.

**1.8 Research Limitations**

During data collection of this study, there were some of the limitations which were encountered by the researcher. Firstly, the study was limited by insufficiency of time; this is because the study was dominated by qualitative than quantitative aspects. Thus, interviews were taking longer than was expected. This was, however, curbed by having an assistant who helped in the collection of data from some respondents. Another limitation was many headteachers were very busy with administrative activities. This was however solved by finding them in their rest time to accomplish data collection procedures.

The use of the digital voice recorder during the interview posed a challenge. Most of the participants were not ready to be recorded, and this aroused a concern. However, before each interview session, the researcher asked the respondent permission to use the digital voice recorder. A tape recording was done to a very few participants who were willing to be recorded.

## 1.9 Delimitation of the Study

The study was centred on the influence of fee-free education on parental and community participation in primary school activities inSongea Municipality-Ruvuma region, Tanzania. The study was conducted in the selected public primary schools which were located in seven wards. The study did not include private primary schools because they do not receive direct government support in the provision of education.

## 1. 10 Definition of Key Terms

In the context of the study the following words/phrases were taken to mean the following:

**Parental/Community Participation**: This refers to the way/process through which parents/community are involved in school matters/activities such as in decision making and general welfare of pupils’ learning.

**School activities**: Refers to all activities done in school to enhance transferring of knowledge, skills and attitude to pupils. They may include teaching and learning, decision making on how pupils should learn and supportive materials, teacher-parent meetings and parenting.

**Fee-Free Education**: Refers to the government’s effort to make basic education more accessible to every child by making parents not pay tuition fees.

**1.10 Organisation of the Dissertation**

This dissertation is organized into five chapters. Chapter one introduces the research problem by setting its background and stating the problem. The chapter also provides the purpose and objectives of the study, research questions, significance of the study, operational definition of key terms, and limitation of the study, delimitation of the study and organization of the study.

Chapter two mainly reviews related literature that gave insights into the research problem and its methodology. The research methodology employed in the current study is described in chapter three. Chapter four focuses on data presentation, analysis and discussion of the research findings and chapter five gives the summary, conclusions and recommendations of the study.

# CHAPTER TWO

# LITERATURE REVIEW

## 2.1 Introduction

This chapter reviews the existing literature both theoretical and empirical ones related to the current study. It is divided into sections reflecting the research questions the study sought to answer. The reviewed literatures revolve around free basic education and parental participation in school matters at global level, Africa and Tanzania in particular.

## 2.2 Theoretical Literature

This section discusses the influence of fee-free education on parental and community participation in primary school activities. The theoretical base to the current study was influenced by a combination of the advantages drawn from two models of the Epstein’s theory of overlapping spheres of influence related to parental involvement. The theory has a great influence on the research field, and therefore it is discussed with respect to parent involvement.

**2.2.1 Related Theory of This Study**

This study used the so-called ‘‘Overlapping sphere of influence’’. It is related to the study because it touches on the issues of students or pupils learning and growth.

### 2.2.2 Theory of Overlapping Spheres of Influence

This theory was developed by Joyce L. Epstein. The theory presupposes that there are three major contexts in which students/pupils learn and grow (Epstein, 2009). These are the family, the school and the community. These contexts or spheres may be drawn together or pushed apart (Epstein, 2009; Epstein et al., 2002). This means that there are some practices that schools, families and communities conduct separately and some which they conduct jointly to influence children’s learning and development. This study takes the view that the spheres are conducted jointly. In this view, family, school and community work as partners. They recognize their shared interests in responsibilities for children and they work together to create better programmes and opportunities for pupils.

In a nutshell, Epstein’s theory was found to be relevant to the current study because of its insistence on the partnership between the three spheres or contexts which are substantial for pupils’ learning. It is this partnership that forms the area of interest of the current study that is, parents’ participation. The theory presupposes that family, school and community partnership activities must be designed to engage, guide, energize and motivate pupils to their own success. Parents, family and community form important elements of the three overlapping spheres. Thus, parent/community involvement and cooperation with the school is essential for the effective functioning of the school.

## 2.3 Policy Perspectives Underpinning the Provision of Fee-Free Basic Education

The provision of free basic education is an international agenda. It is argued here that countries that practice free basic education are basically influenced by international policies. From this belief, the current researcher thought that it was important to review literature which links free basic education and available international policies. Below are international policies on free education which are considered to influence the provision of free education.

The Universal Declaration on Human Rights adopted in 1948 is one of the notable milestones towards the provision of free education. UDHR proclaims in article 26 that everyone has the right to education. The article stresses further that education shall be free, at least in the elementary and fundamental stages (UN, 1948). The International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) recognizes the right to education without discrimination of any kind and sets forward a framework to achieve the full realization of this right including free and compulsory primary education (UN, 1966). The SADC Protocol (1997) on education and training also insists on free basic education. The protocol urges member countries to have compulsory basic education for a period of not less than nine years (URT, 2014). Others include the Convention on the Right of the Child (CRC, 1989), UNESCO Convention against discrimination in Education (UNESCO, 1960).

## 2.4 Fee Free Basic Education: Experiences from other Countries

The provision of free basic education has been an agenda to many world governments. The practice is being attached to different purposes depending on each government’s focus. Free education has been considered as a tool to advance education to all citizens, minimize the number of children who stop going to school because of economic reasons and balance the education differences between rural and urban areas (EACEA, 2013).

In Europe for example, Bulgaria offers a good experience of European countries implementing free basic education. Education in state-owned schools is free of charge and it is compulsory until the age of 16 (UNESCO, 2010). There was notable progress in primary education following the implementation of compulsory education. For instance, enrolment in primary schools rose to 93% in 1998(The National Statistical Institute, 2011).

The ratio of females to males in primary education was 0.97 (The National Statistical Institute, 2011). Studies suggest that majority of the European countries have been providing free basic education for nearly100 years or slightly longer(Lowe, 2017). These countries helped the development of the idea of free primary education for all and they continue to fund free education in developing countries through various aids and other programmes such as the Millennium Development Goals (Lowe, 2017).

In Asia, countries are catching up and most of them offer free basic education to the best of their ability (Lowe, 2017). Taking China, for example, great achievements are evident in universalizing compulsory education. As a country, China has enacted a law, Compulsory Education Law, through which charging tuition fees at the compulsory level of education is forbidden (Kattan, 2006). According to the Compulsory Education Law, a nine-year free and compulsory education is implemented by the state for all school-age children and adolescents (Guo, et. al, 2019).

With the Compulsory Education Law, China has made huge progress in education development in terms of improving access and attainment and reducing inequality. The number of pupils admitted by primary school education has relatively increased at around 17 million (Guo, et al, 2019). However, in areas experiencing war, for example, Afghanistan and Iraq, classes may not always be attended by pupils and therefore are far back in terms of access and equity to education (Lowe, 2017).

Sub-Saharan Africa has benefited greatly from free basic education. For example, in Ethiopia, the most readily available tool to promote enrolment is the removal of schooling fees (Chickoine, 2016). In 1994, the government issued Education and Training Policy (ETP) as one of its efforts to reform education in the country (Oumer, 2009; World Bank, 2009). The central consequence of ETP was that it required that public education be fee-free for grades one through ten (Oumer, 2009; World Bank, 2009; Chickoine, 2016).

According to Chickoine (2016), free primary education in Ethiopia led to an increase in schooling and that the increase in schooling led to a significant reduction in the number of births for Ethiopian women. In Ghana, the government’s mission is to ensure that all Ghanaian children of school-going age are provided with quality education. The Free Compulsory Universal Basic Education (FCUBE) was launched in 1995 promised universal education by 2005 (Akyeampong, 2009). The Ghana Living Standards Survey (GLSS4) found that 83% of the girls and 86% of the boys aged 6-11 were enrolled in school in 1998 following the implementation of FCUBE. By the time of the GLLS5 survey in 2006, these figures had increased to 85% for both boys and girls (Little, 2010).

In Kenya, since independence, the government has been articulating the need to attain universal primary education. To demonstrate its conviction, the government ratified the recommendations of the 1990 World Conference on Education for all and the Dakar Framework for Action adopted at the 2000 Dakar world Education forum and endorsed the goals of the millennium summit. In this respect, in 2003, the government declared Free Primary Education (FPE) policy which mandated all children not to pay school fees (World Bank, 2006). However, with the exceptions of Somalia, Sudan, Angola, Gabon, the Ivory Coast and Cameroon, all countries in Africa offer free primary education with families paying for books, supplies and themselves (Lowe, 2017).

From the above experiences drawn from different countries, it is evident that the abolition of school fees has made education easier and less costly. Hence, it increases school enrolment and retention, which contribute to the achievement of EFA goals (USAID, 2007; Arendse, 2011). For example, Ugandan enrolment doubled the year after the abolition of school fees (HakiElimu, 2017). Similar outcomes have been reported in other countries such as Kenya, Malawi, Cameroon, Zambia, and Lesotho (HakiElimu, 2017).

## 2.5 Fee-Free Basic Education: The Tanzanian Experience

### 2.5.1 The Need for Free Basic Education

Tanzania is the best example of countries that are committed to offering free education. Driven by a motive to reduce disparities in educational access among social classes (the haves and the haves not), school fees in primary schools were abolished in 1963(Cameron & Dodd, 1970). However, with the 1980s economic recession and pressure from IMF and World Bank to follow the Structural Adjustment Programme, the country was forced to introduce a cost-sharing policy in education (Daven, 2008). With these changes, financing primary education became a joint responsibility of parents and the government (Mlaki, 2014; Msoroka, 2010). Until the year 2000, parents were contributing 2000/= in addition to other parental costs such as school uniforms and stationery. Other costs such as teachers’ salaries and textbooks were carried by the government (Msoroka, 2010).

The abolition of school fees for basic education was re-featured in 2002 when the country implemented Primary Education Development Programme (PEDP). Abolition of schools fees and all other mandatory contributions was a government strategy or activity to expand enrolment in primary education (Rakeshi & Omondi, 2003). Evidence suggests that under the PEDP scheme enrolments in primary schools increased. In one year, after the implementation of PEDP, the enrolments raised by 43.3% from 1,139,334 million in 2001 to 1,632,141 million in 2002 (Haki Elimu, 2017).

Similarly, Msoroka (2010) observed the same when he argues that the rate of enrolments in primary schools has been increasing following the PEDP initiative. The enrolment rate, for example, increased from 5,981,338 pupils in 2002 to 8,441,553 pupils in 2009 which is an increase of 41% (Dennis & Stahley, 2012). One would associate this increase in enrolment during the PEDP period with the abolition of school fees in primary education. Some evidence (Joseph, 2014) however, established that the strategies which were opted to enhance free basic education such as Primary Education Development Plan (PEDP) did not show clearly how parents’ participation in education activities should be.

Further researches on the practice of free education include the work of Asim et al (2018). The study examined the fiscal implications of free education. It was evidenced that the introduction of Fee-Free Basic Education (FFBE) which extended the abolition of fees to lower secondary schools created a surge of new students entering primary education. It was further revealed that the introduction of FFBE was associated with a one-off boost to primary intake. For example, the intake of pupils into standard one rose from 1.5 million in 2014 to 2.1 million in 2015/16 and 2 million in 2016/17 as large numbers of overage pupils entered the system in response to the policy (Asim et al., 2018).

Although many factors have been examined to account for low parents and community participation, the impact of abolishing school fees on parents and community participation in schools has not adequately been captured. That being the case, conducting research to establish the impacts of abolishing school fees on parents/community participation is needed and it is of great paramount.

### 2.5.2 Fee Free Basic Education in Tanzania – Policy framework

There are several national policies on which the idea of free basic education draws heavily. The 1978 Education Act is one of those policies. The Act made primary education compulsory for children between the age 7 and 13 (Stahley & Dennis, 2012).By forcing primary education to be compulsory, one can argue that the 1978 Education Act has been influencing other policies which enforce free basic education in Tanzania.

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The National Strategy for Growth and Reduction of Poverty (NSGRP II) is another policy with an influence on provision of free basic education in Tanzania. Section 4.2 of phase II strategy focuses on improvement of quality of life and social well-being. In this respect, ensuring equitable access to quality education at all levels for males and females is given due attention (United Republic of Tanzania, 2011). It is clearly articulated that the improvement of quality of life and social well-being will be achieved with ensuring universal access for boys and girls to pre-primary and primary education. The strategy targets to achieve Net Enrolment Ratio (NER) at 100%for pre-primary and primary schools (United Republic of Tanzania, 2011).

Currently, Tanzania is implementing a new education policy (ETP) of 2014 in which provision of free basic education is of great concern. To ensure equitable access to basic education, the Education and Training Policy (2014) declares categorically the provision of free basic education. The policy stipulates clearly in section 3.1.3 that basic education should be made compulsory (United Republic of Tanzania, 2014). In section 3.1.5, the government’s commitment to offering free basic education is clearly stated. The policy states *“…the government shall ensure a free basic education in public system”* (United Republic of Tanzania, 2014, p. 24).

In order to ensure enforcement of free basic education, a series of circulars were issued. Such circulars include educational Circulars No.5 and No.6 of 2015. The circulars formalized the government’s commitment to provide free education (United Republic of Tanzania, 2015a). However, there has been mixed understanding and perceptions on free basic education policy. Some parents perceive it as fee free basic education to mean that they were no longer required to contribute or participate in any activity related to education of their children (HakiElimu, 2017).

What is common in all policies discussed above is that they all aim at enabling equitable access to education for all school aged children. The governments have an obligation, therefore, to fulfil this concern so that all school aged children access education.

## 2.6 Parents/Community Support to School Activities

Parents/community involvement in school activities involves parents/community interaction and participation with school and their children to promote academic success (Hill et al, 2004). Parents/community support to school activities constitutes the combination of commitment and active participation on the part of parents/community in schools and students’ matters, especially those related to their involvement in schools.

Parents or community support to school activities is a medium for augmenting and enhancing the social, cognitive, emotional and spiritual development of pupils (Preston, 2013). To some scholars, community support to school activities is a readily available resource for addressing challenging societal issues such as the increased number of pupils and the outcome of discrimination and poverty experienced by many marginalized groups of people (Tymchak, 2001). It can be argued therefore that parents/community involvement in school activities must be geared towards improving pupils’ success.

There is variety of reasons as to why policy makers, scholars and educationists emphasize community support or involvement in school activities. In many educational policies, it is believed that independently, the school cannot supply all the conditions and resources that a learner needs in order to flourish (AISI Education Partners, 2008). Thus, the school requires support of the community to survive in this respect.

There is also evidence from research showing that parents and community involvement in school improves pupils’ achievement (Epstein, 2011; Nyembeke, 2016). Joseph (2014) holds the same view arguing that effective participation of parents and community in school activities is important because it improves pupils’ achievement and school efficiency. Furthermore, parents and community involvement in school activities has been associated with a reduction in a negative student behaviours and improvement in students attendance (Simon, 2001).

Limited or lack of parents/community support to school activities has been considered part of the shortcomings of children’s education for at least 40 years (Nyembeke, 2016). Although lack of parental/community support to school activities may be contributed to by many factors, existing empirical evidence (Kattan, 2006; World Bank & UNICEF, 2009) link it to the abolition of school fees and other parental contributions. Kattan (2006) raised an argument that although the abolition of school fees has many promising outcomes, it has some challenges including the decrease of parental participation in school activities. Similarly, reporting on the lessons of abolishing school fees in Africa, the World Bank and UNICEF (2009) mentioned the challenge of parents and community participation as major challenges that must be confronted with great urgency.

Other studies such as Fitriah (2010) explored parental participation in school management in Indonesia. Fitriah’s study found that the characteristics and the extent of parents’ participation in school management have changed and decreased significantly as a result of a new Free School Programme (FSP) introduced by the government in 2009. The FSP freed parents from school operation cost. However, the study did not establish the reasons as to why FSP decreased parents’ participation.

In Tanzania, fee free education has been a serious government agenda in order to redress gender and geographical parity in education. A few researches give a picture on how far interest on parental community participation has been the area of interest to researchers. Study by Dennis and Stahley (2012) on Universal Primary Education (UPE) in Tanzania, with a special attention on the role of school expenses and opportunity costs, found that there were higher attendance rates by 95% than other estimates.

HakiElimu (2017), while investigating the impact of free education policy on basic education in seven districts (Korogwe, Muleba, Tabora Urban, Njombe, Mpwapwa, Sumbawanga and Kilosa) of Tanzania, mentioned the issue of poor parent participation as a challenge to free education. On the other side, a study by Joseph (2014) on factors hindering parents’ participation in school activities in secondary schools in Arusha district, established that Primary Education Development Plan (PEDP) policy did not show clearly how parents’ participation in education activities should be.

## 2.7 Parents’ Views on their Participation in Primary School Activities in the Context of Fee Free Education

Regarding parents’ views on their participation in primary school activities in the context of free education, few research evidences have been revealed through studies conducted outside Tanzania. For example, Fitriah (2010) conducted a study on community participation in Indonesia by exploring an Indonesian case study of parental participation in school management. The study revealed that the new absence of financial contribution by parents/community has affected a great deal parental/community participation by transforming it into a weaker form of participation where parents/community acts as mere beneficiaries. The study reveals further that prior to Free School Programme (FSP), parents/community were actively involved in terms of supplying resources and involvement in school meetings; some had access to financial information and had limited engagement with school budgeting through representation in school committees (SCs).

The Tanzanian experience depict similar availability of research works conducted in relation to parents’ views on their participation in primary school activities in the context of free education. Haki Elimu (2017) while investigating the impact of free education policy on basic education in seven districts (Korogwe, Muleba, Tabora Urban, Njombe, Mpwapwa, Sumbawanga andKilosa) of Tanzaniaon the issue of parents’ perceptions of free education, found that majority of the parents had heard of free education on radio or through newspapers and they were unclear about what it meant and thought that they would not have to make any contribution for the education of their children.

A study by Nyembeke (2016) on parental involvement in academic activities in community secondary schools in Tanzania reveals that 67% of the parents who registered their students in schools did not involve themselves effectively in their children academic activities such as guiding students in attempting home works, checking daily students’ work, tracking students attendance volunteering in school activities and communicating with teachers and other personnel including head teachers. The study also identified parents’ views on what was making them not attend school meetings. It was revealed that parents were challenged by limited formal education, poverty in their families, limited time and resources among parents and teachers and long distance from home to school.

The study by Mbawala (2017) which assessed the implementation of free basic education in Tanzania using Ruangwa district council as a case study found out that parents had misconception of free basic education and therefore needed to be educated. The study established that parents thought that free education was an opportunity for parents and guardians to engage in social and economic activities. Many viewed that they had left their roles of buying equipment for sports and games, cleanliness to the government.

## 2.8 Empirical Literature Review

Several studies have been done in Tanzania and in other parts around the world concerning the influence of fee-free education on parental and community participation in school activities. Though few studies went direct to discuss the influence of fee-free education on parental participation in primary school activities, the following studies closely give an insight into the influence of fee-free education on parental participation and how it affects the education system. Therefore, this section analysed critically what was said by other researchers about the influence of fee-free education on parental participation in school activities.

The study carried out by Marschall (2006) to Latino students in Chicago, showed that parental involvement in school matters helped parents in increasing skills and knowledge which fostered them to assist their children in school-related activities and home activities. On the other hand, Carnie (2003) study showed that there is a need to give chance to parents in order to participate fully in decision-making processes that focus on the performance of school objectives. It is expected that all parents participate in issues such as school development plans, policy formulation, and school budgeting and annual programmes evaluation.

Gorton (1983) as quoted by Kaggwa (2003) signified that there are no administrators who can effectively and efficiently do all the administrative activities on his/her own. Administrators have to involve teachers, students as well as parents to fulfil a certain task because all are key education stakeholders in schools. Therefore the concern of the researcher is to explore the influence of fee-free education to parental participation in school activities is affected or not.

Parents have for long been noted for their key role in financing schools right from the colonial era especially after the first world war had affected donations for missionaries to run schools in Tanzania (Ssekamwa, 1997). In their study, however, Nancy & Lorraine (2004) found out that impoverished families are less likely to be involved in schooling than wealthier families, and schools in impoverished communities are less likely to promote parental participation in school matters. This conforms to Feyfant & Rey’s (2006) argument that there are families who have the right intentions but are powerless especially those from rural backgrounds or those with little in the way of education. However, a family’s wealth may be one thing and financing schools or providing scholastic materials to their children may be another thing in parental involvement. That is why this study intended to explore the influence of parental participation in school activities after the introduction of free education program.

More international studies conducted to ensure fee-free basic education for the quality of education reflected by Kattan (2006) who surveyed 93 countries in six regions including Africa, East Asia and Pacific, Eastern Europe, and Central Asia, Middle East, North Africa, and South Asia in 2001 and 2005. The countries intended to review primary and secondary education by abolishing school fees; review country profiles based on experiences from other countries implemented fee-free basic education, and identify lessons, success and challenges as well as the recommendation that could apply in other countries intending to implement the policy. Data were gathered in 2001 and 2005 from 79 and 93 countries respectively. Data emphases were textbooks charges, compulsory school uniforms, tuition, parental/community contributions as well as related fees for exams, graduations, and registrations.

The report revealed that out of 93 countries, 16 were not charging fees in primary education. The countries included Tunisia, Bangladesh, Gambia, Sri Lanka, Nepal, Peru, Senegal, St. Kitts and Nevis, Cape Verde, Chile, Costa Rica, Iraq, Cambodia, Tanzania and Guatemala. While 24 countries collected fees for tuition and textbooks, 33 countries collected them to cover costs of mandatory uniforms. However, for lower secondary education the survey involved 76 countries and the results showed that 33 collected tuition fees and 34 collected fees for textbooks. Informal fees related to school activities, parent teacher association and community contributions were most common in basic education.

Epstein (1995) defines parental involvement as families and communities who take an active role in creating a conducive and caring educational environment. Further state that parents who are involved with their children’s education are those who constantly show good parenting skills, communicate with the school staff, volunteer their time in the school, help their children learn at home, take an active role in school-related decision making, and who regularly collaborate with the school community. Joyce Epstein identifies six types of parental involvement in the school –parenting, communicating, volunteering, learning at home, decision making, and collaborating with the community (Kimu, 2012).

For a long time parents have been traditionally playing this function, though they were highly not given a valuable opportunity to partake in the decision-making process in their schools (Hill *et al*, 1990). Parental involvement is nowadays accepted and asserted to effective school development (Hayness, *et al,* 1991). Parents have been contributing insights and knowledge that complement and strengthen social and professional program in schools (Ibid). but the main concern is to see how free education changed the perception of parents in participation of school activities.

According to a study carried out among Latino students in Chicago, Marschall (2006) observes that although there are many causes of low academic achievement; lack of cooperation among schools, parents and their communities plays a big role. This suggests that both the determinants and effects of parents’ participation in school matters should be considered to ensure quality education and quality performance. Quality performance has been a key determinant for students’ further studies and later acquisition of jobs.

Getting parents involved in children's academic improvement needs a direct link between schools and the home environment. On parental involvement and academic achievement, studies have shown to date that the two constructs seem to be positively related (Halsey, 2004). Findings have demonstrated that parent’s involvement in the education of the children is of benefit to parents, children, and schools (Tella & Tella 2003; Campbell, 1995).

The study by Lwaitama, (2000) points out that education starts at home with parents and their attitudes affect the quality of education which their children get. Most parents in Tanzania take little interest in their children’s education. As a matter of fact, repeated evidence has confirmed that the most accurate predictor of student achievement is the extent to which the family is involved in the child’s education, and not the family‘s level of income (Wikelund, 2005)

Parents have for long been noted for their key role in financing schools right from the colonial era especially after the first world war had affected donations for missionaries to run schools in Tanzania (Ssekamwa, 1997). In their study, however, Nancy & Lorraine (2004) found out that impoverished families are less likely to be involved in schooling than wealthier families, and schools in impoverished communities are less likely to promote parental participation in school matters. This conforms to Feyfant & Rey’s (2006) argument that there are families who have the right intentions but are powerless especially those from rural backgrounds or those with little in the way of education.

However, a family’s wealth may be one thing and financing schools or providing scholastic materials to their children may be another thing in parental involvement. That is why this study intended to explore the influence of parental participation in school activities after the introduction of the free education program because there are so many complaints from the parents and teachers about fee-free education.

## 2.9 Synthesis and Knowledge Gap

There is an agreement in literature that the provision of free basic education is an agenda of world governments in response to inequality challenges in education (Kattan, 2006; Haki Elimu, 2017; USAID,2017). Evidence depicts also that the abolition of the policy that forbade parents from paying school fees and other parental contributions was a strategic initiative to support countries in maintaining and accelerating progress toward Universal Primary Education (UPE) outlined in the Millennium Development Goals (UNICEF & World Bank, 2009). Evidence depicts further of the increased enrolments in primary schools as a result of implementation of fee abolition policy (Rakesh & Omund, 2003; Kattan, 2006;UNICEF & World Bank, 2009; Msoroka, 2010; Dennis & Stahley,2012; Haki Elimu, 2017).

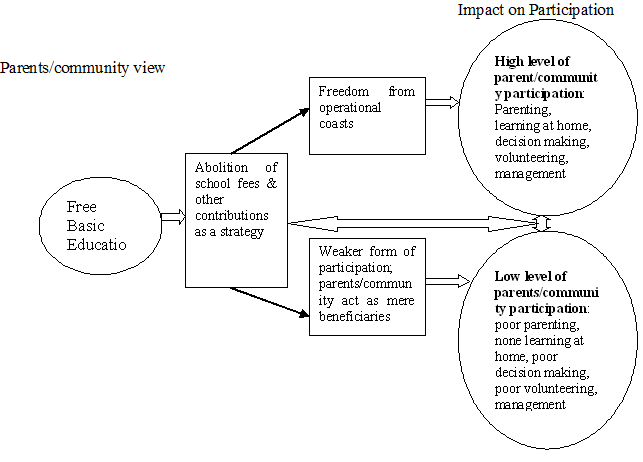
Critically, examining the empirical studies related to the current theme (Kattah, 2006; Fitriah, 2010; UNICEF & World Bank, 2009; Dennis & Stahley, 2012; Joseph, 2014; Mbawala, 2014; Haki Elimu, 2017); it appears that most of the studies investigated the implementation of the abolition of schools fees; parental/community participation in school-related activities was established as a major challenge. However, studies by Kattah (2006), Fitriah (2010), and UNICEF and World Bank (2009) were conducted outside Tanzania in a different context. Other research studies (Dennis & Stahley, 2012; Joseph, 2014; Mbawala, 2014) which were conducted in Tanzania were not conducted in Songea Municipality.

The study by Haki Elimu(2017) although investigated the influence of free education policy on basic education in seven districts (Korogwe, Muleba, Tabora Urban, Njombe, Mpwapwa, Sumbawanga and Kilosa) of Tanzania, did not focus on the influence of fee-free education on parental/community participation in school activities. Also, the study by Nyembeke (2016) which focused on parental involvement in students’ academic activities; did not relate the abolition of school fees and parents/community involvement in school activities. This research study, therefore, bridged this gap.

## 2.10 Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework of this study gives the mental picture on the influence of fee-free education on parental/community participation in school activities. It is argued that within the context of FFEP, the abolition of school fees and parental contributions would have a viable effect on community or parents’ outlook/view regarding their roles and participation in school activities that would eventually impact pupils’ achievement. The study established two basic contradicting views about the abolition initiative of school fees and contributions in the primary school system.

The first view assumed that if the community/parents perceived fee-free education as their freedom from operational costs (school fees and mandatory contributions), it may allow them to participate actively in the non-financial responsibilities of the school. These non-financial responsibilities that defined parents' participation in school activities were parenting, learning at home, communication, volunteering, involvement in decision making on school issues, attending school meetings and school management. Active parental participation in these activities informs high participation in school matters. However, if community/parents viewed school fees and parental contributions as what defined their active participation in school activities, then the abolition might have led to weaker forms of participation as parents/community may act as mere beneficiaries. Below is the figure that conceptualizes the presented idea.



**Figure 2.1: Conceptual Framework**

**Source:** Modified from Epstein (2001)

# CHAPTER THREE

# RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

## 3.1 Introduction

This chapter discusses the methodology that was used by the researcher to carry out this study. The chapter is divided in ten parts: research paradigm, research approach, research design, area of the study, target population, sample and sampling procedures, data collection methods, data analysis, the trustworthiness of the findings, and ethical considerations.

**3.2 Research Paradigm**

Research paradigm refers to worldview thinking or a set of shared beliefs that informs the meaning or interpretation of research data (Kivunja & Kuyini, 2017). It constitutes the abstract beliefs and principles that shape how the researcher sees a world, and how he/she interprets and acts within that world. According to Denzin and Lincoln (2000) research paradigm refers to human constructions which deal with principles indicating where the researcher is coming from to construct meaning embedded in data. In the context of this study, the research paradigm implied the philosophical orientation that influenced data interpretation. It tells how meaning was constructed from data that were gathered.

The current study employed an interpretive/constructivist research paradigm. The basic assumption of the interpretive paradigm was that the researcher would make meaning from the data through personal thinking and cognitive processing of data, informed by interactions with participants (Kivunja & Kuyini, 2017).In this study, the researcher interacted with the participants and ensured that she understood and interpreted what the participants thought or the meaning they made about the phenomenon in their context.

## 3.3 Research Approach

A research approach is a plan of action that gives direction to conduct research systematically and efficiently (Mohajan, 2018). Illustrating the research approach was essential because it helped to enhance the validity of the research to be conducted (Mohajan, 2018). The study investigated the influence of fee-free education on parental and community participation in school-related activities in primary schools. The current study employed a qualitative approach and a little bit quantitative approach to explore data which addressed the major questions of the study.

The qualitative approach refers to the meanings concepts, definitions, characteristics, and descriptions of things (Goodman, 2011). With respect to the above conception, it can be argued that the qualitative approach focused on innovative ways of collecting and analyzing non-numeric data collected in natural settings. The approach helped the researcher to understand people and the social and cultural contexts within which they lived (Myers, 2009).

The researcher used a qualitative approach because the research questions guided this study required qualitative data (Mohajan, 2018). In this study, the researcher preferred to use a qualitative approach, because she wanted to interact with the participants directly in their real-life contexts. With this approach, the researcher expected to explore in-depth the understanding of participants’ perceptions and opinions on the studied topic (Best &Khan, 2006).

## 3.4 Research Design

The research design is a structure or overall framework of methods and techniques chosen by the researcher to combine various components of research in a reasonably logical manner so that the research problem is efficiently handled (Akhtar, 2016). The research design articulates what data is required, what methods are going to be used to collect and analyze data and how all of this is going to answer research questions. The current study employed a survey design. Since the study involved discovering the influence of free education on parental and community participation in school activities that is why survey study design was employed. In this respect, relevant data from all three schools/sites were treated as a whole (multiple holistic) (Yin, 2014). The researcher was confident in using this design simply because the design helped to obtain a substantive picture of reality about the problem which was investigated (Theiler, 2012).

## 3.5 Area of the Study

The study was conducted in Songea Municipality. Three public primary schools (schools A, B, and C) were involved in the study. Songea Municipality was chosen because some scholars depicted the non-involvement of parents/community in school-related activities in some parts of Tanzania including Songea (Equip-Tanzania, 2016). Songea Municipality, being part of the United Republic of Tanzania, implemented a Fee-Free Primary Education policy. In a normal conversation with the acting Municipal Primary Education Officer (MPEO) in 2019, he complained over the existing challenge of low participation of parents/community in school activities. For instance, he complained about the poor motivation of parents to contribute to food provision for their children in schools. This study, however, focused on whether parents’ non-involvement in school activities in primary schools was associated with the abolition of school fees and parental contributions.

## 3.6 Target Population

The target population for this study was all public primary school teachers, all public primary schools head teachers, all ward education officers and parents with children enrolled in primary schools in Songea Municipality. A mix of participants from these groups helped to yield credible data that answered the generated research questions for the study.

## 3.7 Sample and Sampling Procedure

### 3.7.1 Sample Size

The study used a sample size of 31 participants drowned from three primary schools located in one ward. The sample comprised 18 teachers (6 from each school), one (1) ward education officer, 3 head teachers and 9 parents/community members.

### 3.7.2 Sampling Procedures

Two qualitative study sampling techniques were used to enhance the selection of well-informed participants for the study. These were purposive and convenient sampling techniques.

**Purposive sampling:** Purposive sampling is an informant selection method due to the qualities the informant possesses (Tongco, 2007; Hayes, 2019). In the current study, purposive sampling (a non-probability sampling technique) helped the researcher to choose the cases that helped to answer research questions based on the researcher’s own judgment (Play, 2008). The technique was applied to select head teachers from three selected primary schools and a ward education officer.

The researcher believed that using this technique was important to capture relevant information from the participants in the administrative cadre; their views and ideas by virtual of their experience were compatible with study questions (Tongco, 2007).Data from these participants helped to enrich information related to behaviour of parents or members of the community when it came to participation in school activities (Kombo& Tromp, 2006; Omona, 2013).

This study also employed convenient sampling. With Convenient sampling, which is a non-probability sampling technique, participants were selected based on their convenient accessibility and proximity to the researcher. That is to say, participants were selected just because they were easy to contact or reach. Convenient sampling was specifically administered to select teachers and parents/community members. This was due to the reason that teachers and parents constituted a large proportion of the population and they had their daily commitments.

Given this scenario, it might not be easy to get them involved. The researcher, therefore, contacted teachers and parents/community members who were readily available and ready to be part of the study. In each of the selected schools, six teachers and at least three parents/community members who were easily accessible and willing to be part of the study were involved.

## 3.8 Data Collection Methods and Instrumentation

Methods of data collection involve the process of collecting information based on variables of interest to reflect the direction that helps the researcher to respond to the study questions and or objectives (Kothari, 2004; Sapsford & Jupp, 2005). This study employed three data collection methods: interviews, focus group discussion and documentary reviews. Similarly, the study involved such instruments as semi-structured interview guides or schedules, focus group discussion and documentary review guides.

### 3.8.1 Individual Interviews

An individual interview is the data gathering technique involving verbal communication between the researcher and the participant (Coughlan et.al, 2009). It is a valuable method used to gain insight into people’s perceptions, understanding and experiences on the given phenomenon. It contributes to in-depth data collection (Edward & Holland, 2013). In the context of the current research, semi-structured interviews were used. The researcher developed a list of questions/topics (interview guide) which were covered during interview sessions. The prepared interview guide was administered to head teachers, parents and ward educational officers to solicit detailed information from their point of view (Yin, 2003).

Semi-structured interviews were considered relevant to this study because the researcher wanted to have a flexible way of asking follow-up questions (William, 2015). The researcher had room to give clarifications in case participants did not understand the asked questions and in case of limited unnecessary information from the participants (Creswell, 2012). Each participant was interviewed only once. The questions were set in the Kiswahili language (a national and widely spoken language among Tanzanians) to allow freedom of discussion between participants and the researcher. Each interview session lasted between 30 and 45 minutes. With participants’ consent, the voice recorder was used to record all interview sessions which aided greatly in the process of data analysis and interpretation. The researcher used also field notes to supplement the voice recorded data.

### 3.8.2 Focus Group Discussion

This is a data-gathering technique that essentially involves a small group of participants engaged in a collective discussion on a topic previously selected by a researcher (Edward & Holland, 2013). A list of questions/topics was prepared to guide each focus group discussion session (Nyumba et.al, 2018). Focus group discussions were administered to teachers. Six teachers from each school formed a discussion group. The researcher used such a small number of participants because she believed that such several teachers (participants) would foster intimacy, encourage more openness and be easier to manage (Isaac, 2017). Each group discussion session lasted between45 minutes and one hour. With participants’ consent, the voice recorder was used to record all the discussion sessions.

### 3.8.3 Documentary Review

The documentary review involves examining documents and graphic materials that carry vital information relevant to the study (Mogalakwe, 2009). The method is effective for deriving information by carefully reviewing written documents or visual information for accessing secondary data (Ahmed, 2010). In this study, the review of documents was conducted at the school level. Documents such as parents’ meeting minutes, parents’ attendance sheets on school activities, and other relevant school records which might help to determine the extent of parents/community participation in school activities were reviewed. Data from these documents enriched the study findings by cross-validating the data obtained through interviews and focus group discussions.

## 3.9 Data Analysis Procedures

The collected data were analysed using a content analysis approach with the aid of 1994 Miles and Huberman’s framework for qualitative data analysis (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Five stages of analysis were followed during the process. Firstly, the researcher transcribed the voice-recorded data. This was followed by the translation stage. At this stage, the verbatim in Kiswahili was translated into the English language by the researcher. Then, the data reduction stage followed. This involved condensing the bulky data from the field by rechecking, sorting, and re-examining the verbatim transcriptions by reducing and compressing them without losing their key messages. Thereafter, the data display stage followed. During the data display stage, the reduced/summarized data were organized into data display sheets with the most recurring or common themes being identified. Lastly, conclusions were drawn out of data patterns established with verifications made using secondary data from documents (Komba, 2010).

### 3.10 Participant Validation

With this technique, the collected data from the field were transcribed. After one week, the researcher went back to participants who were involved in individual interview sessions and asked them to cross-validate the transcribed conversations to check whether what was recorded reflected what they had said previously (Komba, 2010). This opportunity allowed participants to read, add, reduce or refine their previous responses.

Furthermore, the researcher was able to ask for further clarification on the issues raised before. It should be noted that participant validation was only applied to data from individual interviews; for ethical reasons it was not applied to data obtained from focus group discussions. Data from focus group discussions contained views from different participants; hence the researcher thought that for confidentiality reasons, it was not recommendable to share them (Msoroka, 2018).

### 3.11 Triangulation

Two kinds of triangulation were observed to enhance the trustworthiness of the findings. The first one was data source triangulation. Here the researcher used different sources of data to access data needed to answer the research questions (Yin, 2003). For this case, the researcher involved teachers, the ward educational officer and parents/community members as sources of data. Individual viewpoints were verified against others and finally, the rich picture of their perception was constructed. The second triangulation was methodological.

In this study, different methods of data collection were employed. In this aspect, individual interviews focus group discussions and documentary reviews were used. The researcher understood that each data collection method had its strengths and weaknesses. The use of different data collection methods in the study helped to compensate individual limitations and exploit respective benefits (Lauri, 2011).

## 3.12 Ethical Considerations

In conducting the study, the researcher ensured that ethical considerations were integral throughout the research project by doing the following: First, the researcher wrote to the Vice-Chancellor of the Open University of Tanzania to request a research clearance letter, which introduced the researcher to Songea Municipality authorities. Then, the researcher submitted the introduction letter from Vice-Chancellor to Songea Municipal Executive Director to request a research permit from the municipal level (where the study was conducted). The research permit from the municipal level was submitted to the respective school and ward level to request their involvement in the study.

In this study, informed consent was observed among participants. This was a voluntary agreement with participants to participate in the research project (Shahnazarian, et al, n.d). Obtaining consent in this study involved informing the participants about their rights, the purpose of the study, the procedures to be undergone and the potential risks and benefits of participation. In that sense, all participants were consulted to seek their willingness to take part in the study. Only those who were willing and ready to participate were involved.

Furthermore, in this study, the copyright regulations were observed throughout writings. Sources of information and data which were used in this study were fully acknowledged to avoid plagiarism. Nonetheless, confidentiality was also observed in the study. The collected raw data were kept away to protect them from being accessed by unauthorized persons. Additionally, the researcher maintained the anonymity of participants throughout the dissertation by not mentioning names/schools or display personal details. Participants were also treated with due respect.

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# CHAPTER FOUR

# DATA PRESENTATION, ANALYSIS, INTERPRETATION AND DISCUSSION

## 4.1 Introduction

This chapter discusses the findings related to the influence of fee-free education on parents and community participation in public primary school-related activities. Analysis and discussion of the findings are presented based on the research objectives this study sought to accomplish. For clarity and consistency in presentation, analysis and discussion of the findings, the chapter has been sectioned following major themes which reflect the major research questions and objectives after the status of parent/community participation in the school activities section.

**4.2 Demographic Information**

The table below shows the number of participants reached by the researcher during data collection. There were 3 head teachers, 18 normal teachers, 1 ward educational officer and 9 parents. Therefore, there were 31 respondents in total.

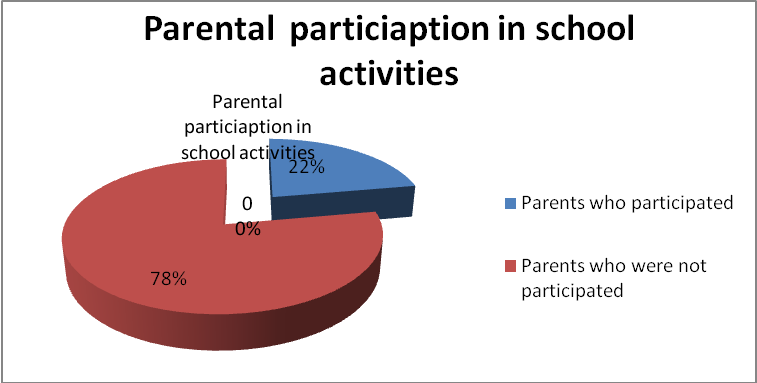
**Table 4.1: Demographic Information**

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Category** | **Number** | **Percentage (100%)** |
| Head teacher | 3 | 10 |
| Normal teachers | 18 | 58 |
| Parents | 9 | 3 |
| Ward educational officer | 1 | 29 |
| Total | 31 | 100 |

**Source**: Field Data, 2020

## 4.3 Influence of Fee-Free Education on Parental Participation in Primary School Activities

Parents’ participation in school activities is very essential in enhancing the administrative and operational activities of the school. Parents have such a big role to advise the school management on what to rightly rely on for smooth running of the school, participate in voluntary works at school and contribute in support of the school activities and projects. It was, therefore, important to audit the extent to which parents were participating in supporting schools in different activities after the newly Fee-Free Education Policy (FFEP).



**Figure 4.1: Parental Participation in School Activities**

**Source:** Field Data, 2020

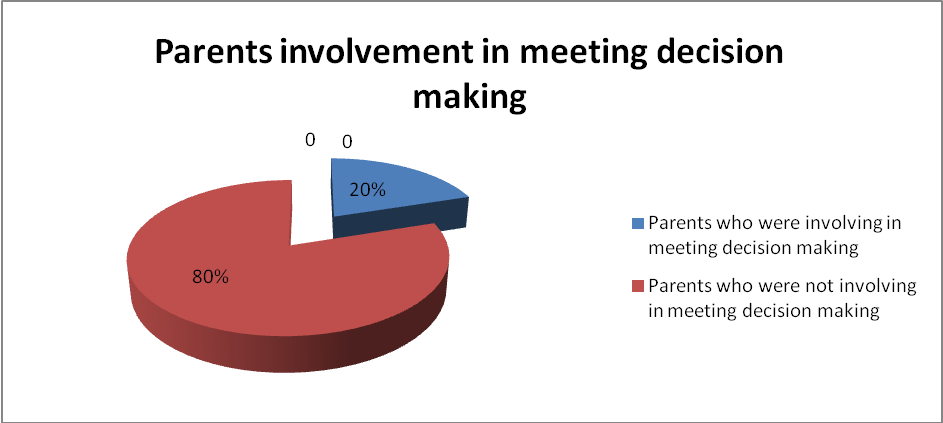
The first research question of this study was geared to establish the influence of fee-free education on parents’ participation in school activities brought about as a result of the implementation of the Fee-Free Education Policy (FFEP). To access the needed information in a bid to respond to the research question, separate interviews with head teachers (HTs), Ward Education Officer (WEO) and parents were conducted. Also, FGDs with teachers and documentary reviews were conducted to cross-validate the information gathered through the interviews.

The findings to this question were captured using five areas in which parents’ participation in school activities was evident: (1) attendance to parents’ meetings; (2) parents’ role of taking care of their children; (3) parents’ role in supporting pupils’ learning at home; (4) parents involvement in decision making; (5) parents/ community in voluntary development activities of the school. The findings related to each of these aspects are described in the subsequent subsections with a few verbatims incorporated in their support.

### 4.3.1 Parents’ Involvement in Decision Making Meetings

Parents are expected to be partners in decisions that affect children at school. The intention of involving parents in decision-making is to give them a voice in decisions that affect their children’s education (Sapungan & Sapungan, 2014). In this respect, parents may participate in the parents’ advisory committee; serve as school board members, or as active members of the parents-teachers association. Parents are therefore expected to be able to take part in goal setting, development and implementation of programme activities, personnel decisions and fund allocation for school programmes (Naidoo, 2005).

In this study, parents’ attendance at school meetings was one of the indicators used to determine whether parents/community was participating fully in school activities. The assumption behind this was that it is in school meetings where parents/community raises issues that would be useful for the effective running of the schools. Hence, their attendance at school committee/parents' meetings was important. In this respect, attendance at school meetings suggested the level of parents’ participation and support to schools’ activities.



**Figure 4.2: Parents Involvement in Meeting Decision Making**

**Source:** Field Data, 2020

In this study, interviews conducted with WEO, HTs and parents and FGDs with teachers indicated that although parents had a chance to air their voice on decisions that affected their children at school, yet the utilization of such given opportunities was not well captured by parents themselves. Evidence suggests that parents were part of school management through representation. However, the findings indicate that parents who were members of school committees were attending rarely or never attended the committee meetings. It is noteworthy that these meetings were crucial in deciding the fate of the schools. Interview with the head of school ‘C’ revealed poor parents’ participation in decisive platforms which provided direction for school management. This is what he said:

*We have a school committee here but I can assure you it is not active as such…I have evidence that there are members who attend meetings rarely and those who have never attended. These are ones who when decisions are made, they go way round complaining about the decisions made by a few fellow representatives who attended the meeting… I remember one case at my school…parents decided that examination classes. (standard IV and VII) be provided with food at school to help them stay long at school in order to prepare themselves for national examinations…The decision to contribute was parents based but the implementation of the programme had been a slip…Some parents who contributed came one time at the school with sacks to collect their maize and beans contributed for their children…some even shouted that education was for free so no need to contribute anything!*

The head teacher of school ‘B’ showed a similar concern. S/he complained that most parents did not utilize effectively their decision-making role with a view that nowadays most issues are decided by the government. For that case, parents assume that they would not decide anything. They argued that this could be the reason why school infrastructure (classrooms and toilets) and furniture in some schools were dilapidated and yet mobilization of community effort for their rehabilitation was very challenging. The community has argued that ‘the government is doing everything for schools’. In light of these findings, the head teacher of school ‘B’ argued “…parents and the community have a notion that everything is decided by the government…many decisions initiated by parents do not reach the intended objectives of the school due to the challenge of implementing them…”

Interview with parents showed similar results to those with head teachers. One parent said:

*I’m the member of school committee in our school… I’m sorry to say that this is the third year since I was appointed to be the member of the committee… if I remember well; for the entire time, I have managed to attend only two meetings… I have been very busy with shamba work… After all, the FFEP policy has made us relax because the government is doing everything for us.*

Furthermore, the issue of low parents’ participation was also articulated by a parent at school C. This is what he said:

*The participation of parents is very low when compared to past days… Nowadays only a few of them show cooperation…I can give you the experience madam researcher, we have a tendency to conduct parent meetings to pass important decisions that affect daily running of the school, but only a few of us attend…some times, in the parents’ meetings, we agree to contribute workforce and money in support of school activities but the turn up is poor…majority of the parents claim that they have been relieved by the government’s decision to offer free education...*

Furthermore, this study found that when parents were called for general meetings, their turn-up was very poor. Most of them were reported to be busy with the day-to-day activities that were earning them a living. It was revealed further that schools witnessed postponements of meetings due to poor attendance of parents although they had very important issues that demanded urgent solutions which were to be innovated by parents themselves. One teacher at school B, who, when contributing in an FGD, argued:

*The turn-up in both meetings be a school committee or general meeting is very poor… now I wonder how will the school run if decisions of important issues which are to be decided by parents fail to be resolved?...in my view, FEP has largely contributed to such low motivation to parents to engage in decision making opportunities…*

The same view was shared by another teacher who commented:

*Parents’ morale to attend the meetings called by schools is very low. Several meetings that have been called have not been successful because attendance does not allow for the meeting to be held. The reason behind all this is the FEP. In the past years, schools were seen as community property but nowadays they are government property involvement …*

The parents’ non-involvement in decision making platforms was actively seen on the way they attended school meetings. A few parents attended school meetings because of their unwillingness to contribute funds and nature of economic activities. Taking part in the interview the WEO commented:

*When parents’ meetings are called, parents do not turn-up…sometimes a call may be made thrice, yet parents do not respond…only few do so*

Apart from poor attendance to school committee meetings, this study found that attendance of parents to parental meetings was also poor. In this aspect, the WEO mentioned parents’ reluctance to school activities on one hand, on the other hand, appreciated the work done by a few willing parents for schools’ development activities in the ward. This is what he said:

*Madam researcher, in my ward I can’t say that all parents do not participate completely in school activities… in fact majority of parents do not show cooperation whenever it comes to issues of schools but some take an active role…I have evidence to support how important is parents’ participation into school activities. In 2016, patriotic parents/community voluntarily participated to build C primary school and in 2017, B primary school...they organised, contributed and supervised the constructions of the buildings…the government supported them with roofing and finishing materials.*

The same view was noted by the head teacher of school ‘A’ who explained that:

*In our school, the attendance of parents when called to attend meeting is really unsatisfactory, very poor so to speak…can you imagine, a meeting of 200 to 350 parents may be attended by two or three parents?…Postponing the meetings for some time is a normal practice for us…in this way, we fail to get their inputs and advice concerning various issues facing the school…how can we run a school with ideas contributed to by 3 parents who responded to the meeting call?*

Similarly, during interview session, the head teacher of school ‘B’ disclosed that parents did not respond positively when invited to attend meetings in schools. For cases where meetings were fairly conducted, then calls might be 4 or so. This is what she commented:

*In my school, parents don’t attend meetings, and when they do so, they attend in few numbers…invitation would even be sent to them 4 or more times…with this trend I do not know what the outcome will be to the education of our children. We need parents support and their active participation in various activities including erecting buildings for classrooms, toilets and desks which are challenges to our school.*

During interviews, some parents agreed that their attendance at parents’ meetings was quite poor. For instance, one parent at school ‘A’ claimed that he never attended any meeting at the school where his children were schooling. This is what he said:

*To be honest, I have never attended any parent meeting in this school…I don’t see the reason why I should attend while all the work that we (parents) were supposed to do is done by the government through free education policy, then why bother myself?...to me, parents’ meeting have turned to forced sources of unnecessary contributions…look, every time meetings are held, no any meeting was completed without an agreement that required parents to contribute in cash or in kind.*

A similar pattern of poor and irregular parents’ attendance to school meetings was also found at school ‘B’. The study also found that the number of parents who were attending the scheduled meetings was small. This was well depicted by three parents. One of them said:

*Madam researcher, how dare you attend a meeting for which every time we are invited, the common agenda is persuading us to contribute for the school?…We are told to contribute for food, desks, books and other facilities for pupils…but I ask myself why always demand money from us while the government has banned schools fees and all forms of contributions which had brought disturbance to many parents especially when they were failing to meet the deadlines?*

The second parent said that*“…majority of us do not participate in school activities…we have left the burden to a few parents...*” (Interview with P6, School B, 7th March, 2020).

The third parent commented:

*I don’t remember when I last attended a meeting in my local school…you know it is discouraging that you are called to the meeting and upon attending, you find that you are alone…people are busy with their daily activities. You know life is very challenging…if you don’t go to work then hunger knocks at your door.*

In FGDs, a similar situation was portrayed. Parents’ attendance in meetings was unsatisfactory. In many meetings, parents were invited to attend; the number of those who attended was very discouraging. Several meetings were postponed due to poor attendance. One teacher at school ‘A’ claimed:

I have been a member in parents meetings…have *helped the head teacher to write the letters of invitation several times, but have experienced unsatisfactory attendance…take an example here at our school. We have a pit toilet that was sunk since 2018. Parents were called to attend meetings and agreed to contribute in order to rebuilt the toilet…unfortunately, up to the moment, the toilet has not yet been maintained…worse enough, when they called to attend meetings, parents do not show up.*

*Another teacher had the following to say:*

*Nowadays participation has dwindled especially when compared to what it was some years back …things have been worse since the government declared free primary education. Many parents do not participate in meetings saying that these are bygone practices…of interest; the government is doing everything for their children on their behalf.*

The findings above demonstrate that parents’ attendance in parents’ meetings in schools was poor; suggesting that involvement of parents in school-related activities had declined substantially compared to what it was in the past days. Evidence from studied schools indicates that parents’ number has never turned positive despite the importance of parents meetings in running schools. This finding contradicts the theory of overlapping spheres of influence ( which guided this study) which insists on bringing together the three spheres – family, the school and community – for school prosperity (Epstein, 2009; Epstein, 2011).

The findings suggest that the provision of free education in primary schools has changed parents’ minds and behaviour from being supportive to unsupportive ones. There is a notion in parents’ minds that education is completely free and therefore they don’t see any reason for them to bear any cost. The findings above concur with the findings of Kimu, (2012) who found that most teachers attributed the lack of parental involvement to parents themselves. Arguably, parents were not aware of their responsibilities in parents’ committees or being members of parent-teacher associations.

Although the visited schools had school committees, the existence of these formal structures did not mean that parents were participating. This finding is in connection with Action Aid (2010) which found that most parents who were members of the school committees did not know their role in school governance. Also, these findings are in line with those of Fitriah (2010) who found that the characteristics and the extent of parents’ participation in school management have changed and decreased significantly as a result of a new Free School Programme (FSP) introduced by the government in 2009. The findings are also close to the findings of the Kenya National Commission for UNESCO (2005) which identified that parents believed that education was free and therefore, they wanted not to be involved in running the schools anymore.

It is noteworthy that the present study theorized that fee-free education was strategized to motivate parents to take an active decision-making role in school issues. Parents were expected to revitalize and participate actively in school committees, which gave them a formal platform to engage in school management. However, the results from this study have shown weaker forms of parents’ participation in school management.

The attendance at school committee meetings was very poor, suggesting a misconception of the fee-free education policy among the parents. This also contradicts with the study theory which emphasizes the partnership between family, school and community for children's success. The findings exhibit that poor participation in meetings presents a pushed apart partisanship where parents /community are far from school activities.

### 4.3.2 Reasons for Poor Parents’ Attendance to Decision Making Meetings

The previous section has indicated that parents’ attendance at meetings, in the selected schools, was not satisfactory. This section discusses the reasons for parents’ poor attendance at meetings. In this study, the findings suggest three reasons (3) namely: poor understanding of FFEP, other socio-economic commitments, and avoiding contributions.

**Poor Understanding of FFEP:** Some participants attributed poor attendance to meetings with poor understanding of the FFEP policy itself. To them FFEP refrained parents from school activities. One parent argued:

*Most of us (parents) have not understood the fee free education policy…some of us think that everything should be done by the government…it is time for parents to relax.*

Similarly, another parent said:

*When we were told that education is free, many of us understood that parents were no longer supposed to continue participating in issues concerning the school…it was parents’ time to rest and concentrate on other businesses of life…if the government took our responsibility then what is our role in meetings?*

In the same line, one head of the school commented:

*When called in meetings, they raise the concern that they don’t see the reason to attend because everything is done by the government…the government has banned all forms of parents’ contributions in schools (Interview, HT3, school C, 9th March, 2020)*

One parent commented:

*Madam researcher, what you think the parents would have done? We have been told it is free education…all contributions have been restricted…so we go for meetings for what business? We used to attend meetings because it was through meetings that contributions were initiated…Since we were told that education was free I have never attended any parent meeting.*

The findings of this study are close to HakiElimu (2017) which observed that some parents perceived fee-free basic education to mean that they were no longer required to contribute or participate in any activity related to the education of their children. The findings are also close to Kenya National Commission for UNESCO (2005) which had a similar observation that parents believed that education was free and therefore, wanted not to be involved in running the schools anymore. This suggests a pure misunderstanding of the FFEP.

The conceptual framework for this study held an assumption that the inception of FFEP was geared to free parents from the operational costs that distanced them from school issues. The framework presupposed that freeing parents from fees and parental contributions would motivate and bring them closer to school as demonstrated by their engaging behaviour in various school activities such as participation in decision-making meetings, support learning at home and volunteering to school activities/projects. Poor understanding of the policy has by far jeopardized parents’ engagement in these school practices.

**Other Socio-Economic Commitments:** This study found that some parents did not attend school meetings because of the nature of their day to day life commitments. One parent at school C argued:

*I have experience of the meetings…some time you go there people talk a lot and consume much time…they even don’t think of personal activities…you attend the meeting and the whole day goes by without doing any income earning activity...the other time if you have commitment you can’t choose attending the meeting, you simply go to your work.*

Similarly, another parent said:

*You know it is discouraging that you are called to the meeting and upon attending you find that you are alone…people are busy with their daily activities. You know life is very challenging…if you don’t go to work then hunger knocks at your door.*

Another teacher from school C said that *“…many parents are peasants; they are busy with their farming and other earning activities…*”

Based on the findings of this study, one can argue that a few parents who managed to be attending parents’ meetings might have been those with good educational or economic backgrounds and were eager to help their children learn comfortably. For parents who did not care for their children, their attendance at parents’ meetings was poor; they focused on other socio-economic commitments. Sheehey (2006) argues that most parents are unable to attend school meetings during the school day due to varying factors. He mentioned factors to include low income, parental depression, economic and educational differences between parents and their children’s teachers were identified as factors that were hindering their attendance in school meetings.

From this perspective, one can argue that the poor parents’ attendance in the current study might also have been influenced by the illiteracy level or the economic status of the families. This is also consistent with Back (2010) who found that parental involvement practices differ according to parents’ level of education in the sense that parents with more formal education are more active than less-educated parents. Hence, it can be argued that parents with low formal education are insecure about their knowledge regarding academic matters and thus this works as the barrier to their attendance at school meetings.

**Avoiding Contributions:** Avoiding contribution was another reason for poor attendance to school meetings raised by parents. For instance, one parent from school ‘A’ held that *“…some parents fear contributions…whenever they are called to attend school meetings. They think that they are going to be asked to contribute to new contributions”…*

Another parent added by saying:

*I wish the payment of school fees could continue…I am bored with today’s contributions which bring chaos to poor families…look, the parents’ meetings do not discuss issues of interest of the school…they have turned into a source of contributions which make majority of the parents not see the value of free education.*

*The same argument was given by a teacher of school ‘B’ during FGD as she said:*

*In my view I see parents escaping meetings simply because they know that parental meetings have turned into a platform for many contributions you hear about in schools. But these parents fail to understand that contributing for school is a way of being a participant for school issues bearing in mind the fact that schools are community property.*

*Another teacher argued similarly:*

*FFEP has relieved parents of becoming hostages of school contributions including school fees. If you hold a meeting that reintroduces contributions do you think parents will be positive to that? They will avoid the kinds of such meetings.*

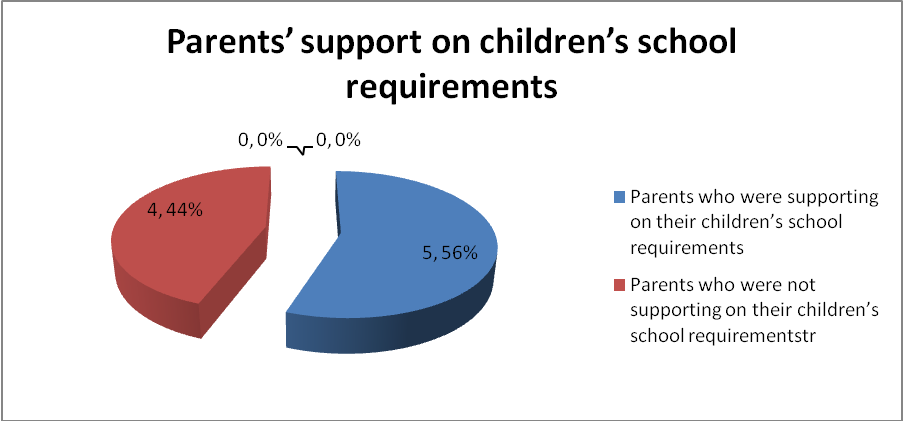
Examining the findings above, one would conclude that parents were tired of school contributions. So any practice that reintroduces contributions was to be resisted. Arguably, this was contributing to poor attendance at school meetings. The conceptual framework for the current study presupposed that fee-free education would eventually raise the commitment of parents to school activities including attending meetings. Epstein’s theory emphasizes parental involvement in school activities to improve the partnership between family, school, and the community. It is argued here that attending meetings is one of the practices parents were involving themselves in school matters.

However, the current findings oppose Epstein’s theory as parents’ participation in school meetings was very low. From this perspective, one would assume that there was a poor partnership between the community and the schools in the selected ward as a result of a fee-free education policy. Arguably, the parents in the current study perceived that fee-free basic education removed them from participation in any activity related to the education of their children (Hakielimu, 2017). The findings of Kenya National Commission for UNESCO (2005) had a similar observation where parents believed that education was free and therefore, wanted not to be involved in running the schools anymore via contributions.

### 4.3.3 Parents’ Support on Children’s School Requirements

Parents’ taking care of their children is another area that determines the parents’ role in participation in school activities. Responsible parents always ensure that their children are supported with school uniforms and all learning materials including exercises books and textbooks. Also, responsible parents feel concerned with the discipline and attendance of the child to school. They take measures in case they find that the child’s behaviour does not support academic achievements.

In this study, it was found that the fee-free education in public primary schools lowered the parenting spirit of parents. The findings show that some parents had turned into irresponsible parents as they did not supply necessary school needs to their children. During interviews, some head teachers agreed that the parenting behaviour of some parents had changed. Children were not supported as if they had no parents or guardians to take care of them.



**Figure 4.3: Parents’ Support on Children’s School Requirements**

**Source:** Field Data, 2020

On this particular observation, the head teachers commented:

*In my view, free education has lowered parents’ spirit of caring for their children… Nowadays; children in our school are not supplied with the needed basic provisions like uniforms, exercise books…Can you imagine, we have children coming to school with civilian clothes! We communicated with their parents; they said that they thought everything was supplied by the school because it is free education, then everything ought to be free including wearing clothes of one’s choice.*

The head teacher of school ‘C’ also said:

*Parents’ commitment to their children is very low…to me I can see that poor understanding of FEP has brought all these troubles…parents think now that the task of taking care of children has turned out to be the government responsibility.*

Interview with parents gave similar results. Some parents complained about the behaviour of some of their fellow parents who seemed to be irresponsible since fee-free education policy in primary schools started to be implemented. One parent notes this with a concern:

*Honestly speaking, most of the parents have become irresponsible. How dare a child of your own goes to school without any learning materials? Some pupils have no uniforms. When we agree to contribute for food there is a great opposing force from parents who always claim that the government has stopped all sorts of parents’ contributions. The government has taken the burden instead.*

On the same regard, another parent said:

*Only a few parents have contributed but many have not. They don’t bother their daughters and sons staying with hunger. Their song is, ‘it is free education’, and the government has banned all contributions that were before being made by parents to schools.’ It is time for us to relax and enjoy.*

Similarly, another parent from school ‘B’ argued:

*We see some of the children going to school without school uniforms, exercise books and texts. We conclude that their parents do not care for them…these are actually irresponsible parents. How dare you just let your son or daughter go to school without any proper school uniforms? Has free education grabbed our role to support our own children? This is indeed a false understanding of the policy in my view. Some parents think that the government has taken our role of caring for our children. So everything now children will get from school. This is wrong, I can say.*

The quoted findings above suggest that parents’ parenting behaviour has fallen. Consequently, school managements have been encountering challenges in their quest to provide quality education and school management. The current findings concur with those of Flynn (2007) who found that parents were not supporting the school and were not disciplining their children when there was a problem at school. It should be noted that when teachers do not feel parental support, they often believe that it is a waste of their time to contact parents (Flynn, 2007).

The conceptual framework of the current study theorized that FFEP was intended to free parents from all sorts of operational costs something that was hoped to ease the parenting behaviour of most parents. It was thought that parents would concentrate and put much effort into their parental roles such as disciplining, supervising and guiding their children on educational matters at home and ensuring that their children were supplied with all basic schooling materials.

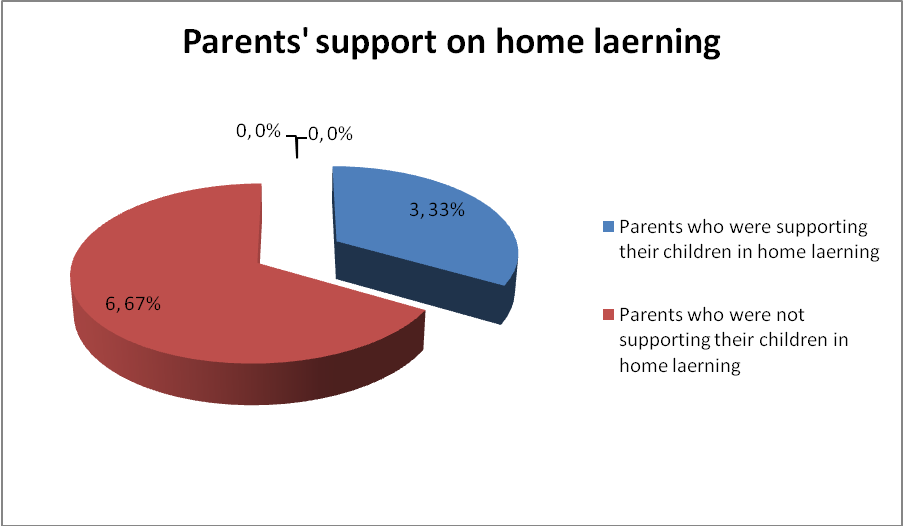
The findings from this study show the existing weaker forms of participation of parents in caring for and supporting their children. This also does not support the theory which guided the study. This is because; an ideal family-like school within the strong partnership between the family, school and community was not demonstrated. Family/community relationships could not reinforce the importance of the school that would be realised through helping and supporting their children. These findings are close to the findings of Haki Elimu (2017) which found that the majority of the parents had heard about free education on the radio or through newspapers and they were unclear about what it meant and thought that they would not have to make any contribution for the education of their children.

Mbawala (2017) reveals similar findings that 67% of the parents who registered their students in schools did not involve themselves effectively in their children’s academic activities such as guiding students in attempting home works, checking daily the student’s work, tracking students attendance, volunteering in school activities and communicating with teachers and other personnel including head teachers. Also, the Kenya Commission for UNESCO (2005) found similarly that members of the community were playing the part to ruin pupils’ behaviour by selling drugs to them, which contributed to disciplinary problems such as absenteeism, teen pregnancies, school dropout and non-completion of school. Should the parents be supportive enough in caring for their children, these forms of practices in schools would have ended.

### 4.3.4 Parents’ Support on Home Learning

Pupils’ academic achievement is dependent on the efforts of the pupil on one side and teachers’ and parents’ on the other side. Usually, parents are expected to play a big role in supporting children’s learning at home. Literature suggests that the effectiveness of children’s learning at home depends on the engagement of parents, grandparents and overall family members within the home environment (Ingram, *et al,* 2007).

Equally important, children with high academic support from parents have shown high academic performance. With regard to this study, the findings from interviews conducted with WEO, HTs and parents show that FFEP had affected parents’ role in supporting learning at home. For some parents, FFEP gave them relief when it came to helping children at home. These parents believed that since education was completely free, parents were not supposed to do anything because the government had covered what they were supposed to do.



**Figure 4.4: Parents' Support on Home Learning**

**Source:** Field Data, 2020

This notion was evident in the interview with the WEO who commented:

*I have evidence about some parents who say that they don’t support their children’s learning at home simply because they are not teachers. If they do the work of teachers, what will the teachers do at school? The government is paying them to teach our children. Some go far thanking the FFEP for removing chaos and disturbances of school fees and contributions. They claim that the government is doing everything on their behalf and thus they have been relieved such that they have time to engage in other businesses.*

Similar finding was pointed out by a head teacher of school C who said:

*Many parents are standard seven leavers. Due to their low level of education, they don’t support their children with their homework or supervise them study at home…Once children are back from school they are given a number of activities to do. They claim that they have spent much time at school and when back at home they must assist them in home engagements.*

Interview with parents showed similar findings that parents were rarely supporting their children’s learning at home. One of the parents commented that*“…most of we parents are not responsible…I wish we could continue paying school fees and all mandatory contributions we could feel the pinch and thus we could support children both at home and school whole-heartedly*

FGDs with teachers revealed similar findings that parents were not supportive of their schooling children at home. They were neither helping them with homework nor reading forthe books. It is suggested, that with FFEP, parents considered that it was the time for them to relax and do away with all disturbances of the past years when fees and contributions were mandatory in schools. One teacher at school ‘A’ argued:

*In my view, FEP has negatively affected parents’ role of supporting children’s learning at home. I can give some evidence to support my view. Look, we find pupils who come to school very dirty but their parents don’t bother. When we give homework to pupils some of them come to school the following day without attempting the home work at home. Some do attempt but with wrong answers something which would not have happened, had the parents played their roles effectively.*

Some parents held different views regarding helping their children. They said that FFEP had relieved them such that they could now take time to support their children in all that could not be offered by the government. They said they had time to support children learning at home and provide them with necessary provisions such as buying exercise books, school uniforms and supplying them with food. This is what one parent argued:

*I am happy that the FFEP has relieved us from a help of commitments. Look! I have time now to inspect my child’s exercise books to check whether he wrote all the notes and did homework. Where necessary, I support him to do correctly his homework.*

Similarly, another parent at school A argued:

*At least I studied to form four secondary educations. When my son comes back from school I have a tendency of sitting together with him trying to assist him academically. If he has questions on some subjects of interest, I support him. I feel rather good to see that he trusts me.*

Furthermore a teacher in FGD argued similarly that:

*The issue of parents helping their children at home in my view depends entire on academic and economic strengths of the parents. Parents with at least a reasonable academic profile say those who reached form four such parents are in a good position to give academic support to their children Again, those parents with good economic position can meet all school requirements of their children unlike those who do not have such means .*

The verbatim above indicates that parents’ involvement in supporting learning at home concerning the studied area differed from one parent to another depending largely on parents’ behaviour. It was noted that some parents who were close to their children were motivated with FFEP to assist closely and support children’s learning. In contrast, unsupportive parents were relaxed with the understanding that everything was the duty of the government. Perhaps, this was contributed to by low levels of education among the parents. Arguably, for parents to be able to support their children academically, they should have such an academic ability themselves. This finding is similar to those of Ascher (1988); Durisic and Bunijevac (2017) who found that parents were not expected to participate in their children’s classroom or provide assistance with home learning activities.

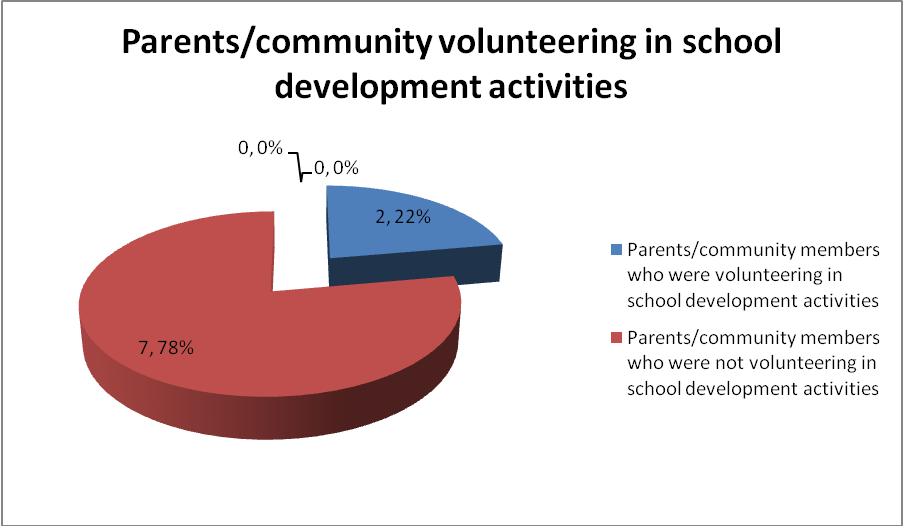
Furthermore, supporting children’s learning at home is attributed to many factors such as educational background and socioeconomic status. This is what Hill and Taylor (2004) found that parents from lower socioeconomic backgrounds were facing many more barriers in their bid to involve their children in learning, including having nonflexible work schedules, lack of resources and stress due to residing in a disadvantaged neighbourhood. It should be noted however that FFEP was expected to reduce the burden to the poor citizens so that they would be more assistive to their children. This study theorized that the removal of school fees and parental contribution could relieve parents from a huge load of contributions and enable them to concentrate on supporting their children’s learning at home.

However, as this study noted, things were different. This study shows that parents were rarely supporting their children’s learning at home. The findings by Mbawala (2017) affirm that many parents who had registered their students in schools did not involve themselves effectively in their children’s academic activities such as guiding them in attempting home works, checking their daily academic activities, and tracking their attendance. These findings are in line with those of McDermott and Rothenberg (2000) who argued that lack of parents’ involvement in school activities both at home and school was an increasing problem and that teachers were frustrated with this. Action Aid Uganda (2009) adds also that parents were not participating in the education of their children at home.

Furthermore, Action Aid (2010) confirmed that the majority of the parents were not helping their children with homework. It was revealed that only 4% of the parents were supporting their children in doing their homework. Finders and Lewis (1994), Action Aid (2010) and Erdener & Knoeppel (2018)attributed parents’ reluctance behaviour in supporting learning at home to being so busy, family income, and their level of illiteracy, poverty and livelihood, and cultural expectations.

### 4.3.5 Parents/Community Volunteering in School Development Activities

Parents’ volunteering to school activities may include helping schools as volunteering teachers in case of shortage of teachers, fundraising, or offering labour for construction projects (classrooms or toilets building) at the school (Durisic & Bunijeva, 2017). All interviews with WEO, HTs, and parents revealed parents’ low self-esteem in volunteering for school programmes and activities. Through observation, the researcher found some existing projects at the visited schools which were initiated by parents many years ago but were still uncompleted. Arguably, this was contributed to by a slip volunteering behaviour of parents for school activities. In the interview with the head teacher at school ‘A’, it was mentioned that parents’ spirit for volunteering had dwindled in comparison to what it was in the past years before FFEP.



**Figure 4.5: Parents/Community Volunteering in School Development Activities**

**Source: Field Data, 2020**

In relation to this dying spirit of parents, this is what was uttered by the head teacher:

*The way I see, prior to FEP parents were taking schools as theirs…so volunteering for school activities was very high…parents were volunteering in brick making, fetching water for school projects. In case of scarcity of teachers, some parents were volunteering to teach some subjects they were able to teach…during sports parents were volunteering to teach traditional ngoma and songs…They also offered labour power in constructing classrooms and toilets. However, since the implementation of FEP the argument has been that the government has paid for the school to hire experts to undertake such activities…volunteering in schools is seen as a bygone practice as it is nowadays very rare to see parents volunteering. If they do, they do it unwillingly fearing punishment from the local government. In fact, they don’t do it by heart.*

Interviews with head teachers at school ‘B’ and ‘C’ revealed similar results. They indicated low volunteering spirit for school activities among parents since FFEP started being implemented. The head teacher of school ‘C’ said:

*Today it hard to see parents volunteering in school activities such as security, contributing for electricity and water bills or participating in ongoing construction projects in schools. Taken example, my school has inadequate toilet pits to serve the entire school population of pupils. In 2016, parents launched toilet construction project of 10 pits…as I speak now the project has not yet been completed and it has almost come to a complete stop. There is a lot of complaints from the construction committee that parents have refused to contribute for the money they agreed to and the attendance to the for toilet construction related activities is very poor.*

A parent at school ‘A’ had a similar view. This is what she said:

*On my side, I don’t participate in all school activities. I just attend those activities which I can manage…we had a building that we were required to make bricks for … I only attended twice…from there I stopped because I was discouraged by poor attendance. Only a few parents were attending in that brick making activity. I have a lot of commitments too.*

The same view was given by another parent who argued that;

“…*we rarely attend…we are busy with life activities…*”Also, another parent said:*“…I have never volunteered in any school project despite the fact that my son studies here…I’m busy with shamba activities…the government has been doing all work for our children on our behalf.*

FGDs evidenced further the low status of parents/community participation in voluntary school activities since the implementation of the free education declaration was effected. This is what one teacher commented in the FGD discussion:

“parents’ response to school voluntary activities are low unlike it was in the past years…majority of the parents have a view that everything is done by the government”.

The same result was revealed at school ‘A’ where one of the teachers who had participated in the discussion argued:

*Parents ‘participation in school activities is evident even though it has gone down drastically. To be honest free education policy has lowered their interest to participate or support school activities...Take an example; the school may be facing problems such as shortage of students’ toilets, desks or classrooms. When such problems are communicated to the parents/community to act on, nobody cares…and for schools where parents agree to contribute, experience reveals there is gross reluctance of parents to contribute.*

Similar results were evident in FGD held with teachers at school ‘A ‘where one of the teachers commented:

*In fact, parents are reluctant to support the school material and money contributions. In their meetings, sometimes they agree to volunteer to build classrooms, students’ toilets and contribute for desks…but when it comes to implementation of the decisions they made, many parents do not live to their commitments. There is total confusion. Others claim that they are not supposed to contribute because the government has already announced for free education…*

The above findings relate to the findings of Mbawala (2017) who found that 67% of the parents who had registered their students in schools did not effectively volunteer in school activities and to communicate with teachers and other personnel including head teachers. Furthermore, Gregory (2018) had similar findings that before FFEP parents were teaming up following the government directives to build classes up to renter level, and the government was supposed to finish the rest of the construction.

However, with the coming of FFEP, this practice was now being sporadically done. Parents were hardly teaming up; they were saying that the government would do everything. Bridgemohan (2002) confirmed that the challenge that the school may need to handle is how to encourage parents to volunteer in school activities and attend events such as school meetings. Epstein, et al (2009) came up with similar findings. They found that the main challenge related to parents’ volunteering to school activities was how to involve families in vital curricular decisions and coordinating family-linked homework activities from several teachers.

As mentioned earlier, the conceptual framework theorizes that FFEP was thought to increase parents’ voluntary behaviour in support of school activities following the banning of school contributions. This was to be evidenced in parents volunteering to construct classrooms, toilets, teacher houses and in helping to teach in classrooms in case of teachers’ shortage. The findings of this study, however, were contrary to the expectations as parents were revealed to volunteer minimally to school activities (Mbawala, 2017; Fitriah, 2010).

Also, the level of volunteering varied from school to school and from activity to activity. Construction projects, especially classroom and toilet building, were shown to receive considerable support in comparison to other activities. What counted for minimal volunteering was parents’ view of FFEP that it had made them stop from actively participating in school activities because the government had taken over what they had been doing before. These results concur with those of Kimu (2012) who argue that most parents felt that since their role as fund-raisers and what they were largely volunteering to do in schools have been taken over by the government, they did not have to participate actively in schools and classrooms. However, parents needed to be made aware that their voluntary and meaningful involvement was important as it was playing a decisive role in developing their children’s potential and they need to be guided to fulfill their role.

The data collected from the documentary review also indicated the low status of parents’ participation in school activities. The reviewed documents included: parents *‘attendance register to voluntary activities, documents on existing voluntary projects, school committee reports, parents’ meeting register book, parents’ contributions record book, parents meetings minutes/reports, and academic progressive report*. Table 4.1 summarizes the findings from the reviewed documents.

**Table 4.2: Status of Parents’ Participation from 2016 to Date**

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **SN** | **Indicators of parents’ participation** | **Status from 2016 to date** | | |
| **School A** | **School B** | **School C** |
| 1 | Parents’ attendance register to voluntary activities | 4 attendances | Nil | Two attendances |
| 2 | Parents’ meeting minutes | 6 meeting minutes out of 20 | 3 meetings minutes out of 20 | 4 meetings minutes out of 20 |
| 3 | Parental voluntary/support projects at school | 2 classrooms building, 10 pits toilet | 4 classrooms buildings | Desks contributions and 2 classrooms building |
| 4 | Presence of school committee | Available | Available | Available |
| 5 | Parents-teachers communication records | Nil | Nil | Nil |

**Source:** Field data, 2020

From Table4.1 above, it can be argued that parental participation in school activities varied substantially from activity to activity. Participation was relatively high in parents’ voluntary activities that involved the building of classrooms and toilets when compared to other activities. However, no documents existed to record parents-teachers communication in supporting pupils learning at home, instead pupils’ academic achievement reports were used to cater for the demand.

The analysis of the findings shows in general that, the attendances of parents in school activities were relatively low and varied considerably. The findings indicate further that although parents were attending school activities, their attendance was very poor. It can be argued that the attendance, therefore, affected in one way or another parents’ engagement in school activities. Parents’ poor involvement in school activities was, perhaps, contributed to by the majority of them being busy with their everyday income-earning activities. So when invited to volunteer to school activities or contribute to something at school, they were not cooperative as such.

These findings support what McDermott and Rothenberg (2000) found that lack of parents’ involvement in school activities both at home and school was an increasing problem and that in fact, teachers were frustrated by this. Finders and Lewis (1994) go further pointing out the reasons as to why parents’ involvement in school activities was low. They argue that parents were reluctant to be involved in their children’s education because they were so busy. It was difficult for them to visit. This could be true of the fact that since the initiation of free education in Tanzania, parents thought that they got relief from school activities and thus having enough time to engage in everyday activities that were making them earn their living.

## 4.4 Parents’ Perceptions on FFEP in Connection to their Participation in School Activities

Research question two was geared to capture parent’s views on their participation in school activities within a free basic education context. The assumption behind this was that understanding parents’ views was important to gauge their understanding of free education policy. Also, this was useful to ascertain parents’ participation level in school activities. Data related to research question two were captured using interviews which were conducted with the WEO, head teachers and parents. Also, focus group discussions were carried out with teachers along with reviewing various school documents to cross-validate the findings obtained from interviews. The findings showed mixed perceptions of parents about free education policy concerning their participation in school activities. The major perceptions are summarized in Table 4.2 below and are detailed analysed and discussed in subsequent sub-sections.

**Table 4.3: Parents/Community’s Perceptions of FFEP**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Policy Statement** | **Parents/community perception** |
| ***The Government shall ensure a free basic education in public system.*** | FFE policy as a kind of freedom from operational costs |
| Weaker form of participation: shift of roles and responsibilities from parents to the government with community acting as mere beneficiaries in the new realm of relationship |
| Increase of family expenditure on education for the poor |

**Source:** Field Data, 2020

### 4.4.1 Freedom from Operational Costs

In this study, it was found that some parents considered that FFEP had freed them from operational costs. Parents who held this view perceived that FFEP had relieved them from paying school fees and mandatory contributions. In the interview session with parents of school “C”, one parent said:

*Madam researcher, I am among those parents who enjoy the outcome of free education policy. Indeed, it has taken away all the hassle we parents were going through donating money. Now the children go to school just to study. Thanks to the government for relieving us of this burden of school fees.*

Another parent from school “C” had the same view when she argued:

*I always meet my fellow parents in street; I hear what they say about the removal of fees and contributions to schools. Many say the free education policy has freed them from the long-standing nuisance of paying fees. I am of their view…Look! We are now free and are struggling to earn a living… our job has remained to make sure that our children go to school.*

Furthermore, interview with parents at school A indicated similar perceptions. Some of them mentioned that fee-free education had freed them from operational costs. Regarding this, one parent said:

*I, as a parent, I am very grateful to the government of our beloved president Dr. John Pombe Magufuli for caring for us we poor families by bothering us not to pay fees. Paying fees was a heavy burden for us poor citizens… now things are okay; there is absolutely nothing to worry about fees, plus contributions for security, water, desks. All of these have been banned. I am very happy.*

Another parent commented:

*This issue of abolition of fees I really like ... we (poor parents) were before very abused child going to school was brought back just because he did not pay school fees or contributions. For me I see this as liberation for poor families. This is a motivation for us to participate in school activities like voluntary ones and other responsibilities which do not require us to pay money.*

Interview with parents of school B revealed further that FFEP was a relief to poor families. One parent argued:

*Some parents could not afford to pay their children's school fees ... even when their children were chased from school back home to collect fees; they did not return to school with the contributions they were required to collect. In my view, this was among the causatives of students dropping out from school. For sure, many children were denied the right to education in the past because their parents had failed to pay fees for them. I believe the removal of fees and other contributions has freed us from this nuisance.*

The findings above indicate that fee-free education was generally perceived by many parents as freedom from operational costs. This is because; parents were relieved from the responsibilities of paying school fees and other contributions. It is argued here that the introduction of FFEP has transferred parental responsibilities to the government. The findings above are consistent with those of Gregory (2018) who found that when fee-free education policy was introduced. Parents were happy that the heavy burden of paying school fees had now been lifted off their shoulders. Gregory adds the majority of the parents have stopped contributing to schools (to cater for some academic expenses) arguing that FFEP had freed them from all those sorts of contributions.

In this regard, the majority of the parents are arguably working under the assumption that the government would provide for everything including books, uniforms and other school-related requirements. It should therefore be understood that before FFEP, parents used to contribute school fees, money for school watchmen, stationeries, and school and sports uniforms. But since the introduction of FFEP, they have been freed from all those sorts of contributions. What they have now been incurring are only indirect costs for buying stationery and uniforms for their children. These results concur with the findings by Twaweza (2018) that parents also make other financial contributions to their child’s education. Almost all households with a child in primary school (99%) were revealed to have purchased materials for their child or children’s schooling over the past year. The most common items households reported to have been spending money on were stationery (98%), uniforms (75%), school bags (26%) and books (15%).

### 4.4.2 Shift of Roles and Responsibilities from Parents to the Government

The findings of this study revealed that some parents were of the idea that free education policy has shifted roles and responsibilities from parents to the government. The principle behind this perception was tied to the fact that before the policy, parents used to pay school fees and mandatory contributions. In short, they were very close to school issues. According to parents who viewed FFEP in light of the shift of roles, they explained that the implementation of free education policy had transferred parents’ roles and responsibilities to the government something that had weakened their participation in school activities. One parent argued in light of the findings saying:

*Myself, I’m very happy with the free education policy. The policy has relieved us (poor parents) from a multiplicity of commitments including paying school fees and mandatory contributions…I can see that the government decided to carry the parents’ load of contributions. The role of paying for the education of our children has shifted to the government. Now the government has been supplying to school all what pupils need in schools including capitation grants to each pupil, supply of books and other facilities and building of school infrastructure.*

Similarly, another parent at school ‘A’ argued:

*In my view, the way I see my fellow parents including me behaving since the start of the free basic education policy, I can say that the government has taken over our roles and responsibilities. We feel relaxed indeed. The government is responsible for everything for our children’s education.*

The interview with parents of school ‘B’ revealed that fee-free education had relieved parents of a range of responsibilities. Parents were now resisting participating in school matters as fee free education meant to them time to rest. This is what one parent said:

*Formerly, we (parents) participated highly in school activities…we were actually forced by law to participate…I remember when we were informed of any school activity. The turn up was good to the majority and those who didn’t respond were punished according to by-laws…FFEP has come and has made us stop from this practice. I can say it is time for us to rest and enjoy.*

Similarly, another parent of the same school argued:

*Unless roles and responsibilities are well defined and explained to us. Otherwise, we view FFEP as a policy that has saved us from a burden of school contributions. This could be the reason to explain as to why some parents are reluctant to participate in school activities. Today many parents do not turn up to developmental activities of the school simply because they don’t want to be disturbed with contributions initiated by themselves through parents’ meetings.*

Fact that it has relieved parents from all mandatory contributions including school fees on one hand, on the other hand, it has resulted in weaker forms of their participation in school activities. In the new form of relationships, parents feel like mere beneficiaries. This is because what was formerly their obligations have been taken over by the government. The findings above are very close to Action Aid Uganda (2009b) which found that parents were not actively participating in the education of their children. It should be noted that FFEP has brought drawbacks rather than success in the aspect of parental participation in school activities. It was thought that parents’ participation behaviour such as parents, volunteering in school activities, and participation in school management would improve much better following parents ‘relief from school fees and parental contributions.

However, things have been contrary. This is because; participation of parents in school matters has even deteriorated as parents are happy that the burden of children’s school expenses has been taken over by the government. Some parents have abandoned their parental duties of following up on their children’s progress at school (Gregory, 2018). As a result, some parents have turned their attention to other activities and forgotten all about their children’s development at school. It is in this realm that Action Aid (2010) called for a need to sensitize parents about their roles in the education of their children through the provision of learning support both at home and school.

### 4.4.3 Increase of Family Expenditure on Education for the Poor

Some parents in the interview sessions disclosed that since the inception of fee-free basic education policy, they were vulnerable to unplanned contributions initiated by parents for the school. These include contributions for food, evening classes, classrooms and toilet construction contributions. These contributions added up to uniforms and exercise books costs incurred by parents. This is what a parent at school ‘A’ argued:

*Despite the fact that fee free basic education policy has freed us from school fees and other contributions; the policy has somehow increased the burden to (us) parents. As a parent of two children studying in this school, I have been vulnerable to unplanned contributions. They just rise from parental meetings for the sake of school activities and projects hear also similar complaints from fellow parents. We feel that the FFEP has added costs of education to the other side. It is better if we could be paying school fees Take an example, there are a lot of contributions we are needed to pay which are initiated by parents’ meetings or school committees. We are told to contribute for food, for water, electricity, graduations and contributions for constructions of classes and toilets.*

Another parent of school “C” had the following to say:

*In my view, the common perception I hold with regard to fee free primary education is that education is not free as many people think. This is because; there is still a range of other emerging contributions that cumulatively have added to education expenses that we parents are now being charged.*

The same view was pointed out by one parent during an interview at school B. The parent argued that although free education policy was being implemented in primary schools, parents were still bearing the costs of education for their children. This is what he argued,

“*I thought that the banning of school fees and parental contributions would give us relief….we are paying more than we were paying the school fees…*”

The findings above suggest that even though the removal of fees in primary schools has relieved parents of the burden of mandatory contributions, on the other hand, parents still face a multiplicity of informal contributions decided by the parents themselves. These contributions have continued to be a nuisance compared to when the fees were paid. The concept of free education here does not even enter the minds of many parents. These results are consistent with those of Akaguri (2014) who argued that although public education has led to the elimination of payments such as tuition fees, examinations and extra classes fee, other direct costs such as feeding and school uniform consume a large part of the household expenditure on education for the poor.

A point of insistence here is the fact that free education is not completely free as many wished to be. The fee-free education policy on one side has freed parents from paying schools fees and mandatory contributions, but on the other side, it has opened a new door to other contributions in the form of voluntary contributions. It is in their meetings that parents decide on what to contribute to the school. There has been a range of contributions in schools that bring chaos to the poor. It is in this respect that Marishane (2013) concludes that fee-free public schooling still leaves households with significant costs. The fee-free education policy was the government’s initiative to free parents from operational costs.

It was hoped that the strategy would impact parents’ participation in school activities thereby strengthening their behaviour on parenting, supporting children’s learning at home, participating fully in decision making and volunteering in school activities. Daven (2008) concludes similarly that Primary education is not free in Tanzania, as there are significant costs involved to send a child to primary schools, such as school uniform, school materials and various contributions that have to be made for the running costs of the school.

## 4.5 Chapter Summary

This chapter has presented the analysis and discussion of research findings concerning the impacts of FFEP on parents’ participation in school activities. The chapter has also presented the analysis and findings on the perceptions of parents/community toward FFEP. The presentation, analysis and discussion were done based on the research questions of this study. In brief, the study revealed that FFEP had impacted invariably parents’ participation behaviour in school activities. It is clear in this chapter that parents had changed their behaviour in attending school meetings.

Also, it is clear in this chapter that parents have changed the way they have been supporting their children’s learning at home, and the way they have been supporting schools for requirements. It is clear in this chapter that parents had mixed perceptions concerning their participation in school activities during this period of FFEP. Some of them viewed FFEP as a kind of freedom from school operational costs; some perceived it (FFEP) as a shift of roles and responsibilities from them (parents) to the government. Others (parents from poor families) viewed FFEP as a means to increase family expenditure on education.

# CHAPTER FIVE

# SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

## 5.1 Introduction

This chapter gives the summary of the major findings of the study. It also gives conclusions and recommendations of this study. The chapter is organized into four sections. The first section gives the general summary of the study and the second one highlights the major findings of the study. Furthermore, the third section gives conclusions of the study and the last section gives the recommendations for actions and areas that need further research.

## 5.2 Summary of the Study

This study explored the influence of fees-free education on parental and community participation in primary school activities. The study was guided by two research objectives: (i) to determine the influence of fee-free education in school-related activities; and (ii) to explore the views of parents regarding their participation in school activities in the context of fee-free education. Also, the study was conducted in three public primary schools in Songea Municipality.

The surveyed literatures showed that parental/community participation in school-related activities was a major challenge within the FFEP context. The current study explored the influence of fee-free education on parental and community participation in primary school activities. The study was largely influenced by Epstein’s theory of overlapping spheres of influence. The theory supports the idea that parents’ involvement in school matters is a crucial factor to children’s academic access. The theory stresses that the school, family and community as partners, recognize their shared interests in responsibilities for children and they work together to create better programmes and opportunities for pupils.

The study was mainly qualitative and little data were quantitative. It employed a survey research design to capture the required information easily. The study employed a sample size of 31 participants. The main data collection methods were interviews, FGDs, and documentary reviews. Data gathered were analysed using a content analysis approach with the aid of the 1994 Miles and Huberman framework for qualitative data analysis. The study revealed the following two key findings:

Firstly, FFEP has resulted in a significant reduction in parental participation in school activities. This has been contributed to by a change of attitudes (among parents) towards schools’ management thinking that the government was responsible for everything (see the discussion in Chapter Four). Consequently, parents have been poorly attending school meetings, and have low spirit in volunteering for school development projects. Also, they have hardly been providing their children with school requirements and rarely supporting their learning at home.

Lastly, Parents had mixed feelings regarding their participation in primary school activities in the context of FFEP. Most of them viewed that FFEP had provided them with a room to escape from contributions and other school responsibilities. As a result, such kinds of parents did not involve themselves in anything about school development and their children’s learning. A few parents thought that FFEP had increased the burden, as it resulted in the emergence of many contributions mandated by parents themselves during parents’ meetings. Furthermore, some parents viewed that FFEP had freed them from the multiplicity of school contributions thereby giving them a chance to engage in non-monetary activities of the school.

**5.3 Conclusions**

The main objective of this study was to explore the influence of fee-free education on parental and community participation in primary school activities, particularly in Songea municipality. To achieve this objective, data collection in this study was guided by three key research objectives namely; (i) To determine the influence of fee-free education in school-related activities. (ii) To explore the views of parents regarding their participation in school activities in the context of fee-free education. Hence, this section gives conclusions on the said three research questions which address the objective of this study.

Based on the first objective that is the influence of fee-free education on parental participation in school activities, the study concludes that the implementation of FFEP has resulted in a significant reduction of parental participation in school activities. This study holds that the reduction of parental involvement in school activities has been influenced by poor perceptions of parents towards a newly established fee-free education policy in the country. As it was found in this study, most of the parents thought that the government was responsible for everything (see the discussion in chapter four). Consequently, parents’ attendance at school meetings became poor. They attended with low spirit in volunteered school development projects because they believe that the government will cover all expenses concerning their children’s education.

Also, based on the second specific objective which aimed at knowing parents’ views on their participation in primary school activities, the study concluded that parents had mixed feelings regarding their participation in primary school activities in the context of FFEP. A few parents were found to have a positive attitude about their involvement in schools’ activities. These parents thought that FFEP had provided them a chance to help more for schools’ development and their children’s learning.

However, most of them thought that FFEP had provided them with room to escape from contributions and other school responsibilities. Hence, calling them to volunteer in anything was regarded as increasing the burden to parents, torturing them, or failure to fulfil their promise about FFEP, this happens especially to poor households. As a result, such kinds of parents did not involve themselves in anything related to school development and their children's learning.

### 5.4 Recommendations

Based on the conclusion made on this study, the following were the recommendations from the findings;

### 5.4.1 Recommendations for Action

1. The findings of this study suggest that government should educate people concerning FFEP with their respective roles and responsibilities.
2. This study recommends that the government should see a way to restrict too many contributions which may lead to parents’ negative attitude towards FFEP. Free education should be free; otherwise, the government should specify what parents should contribute.

### Recommendations for Policy Implication

Since the findings suggest that the influence of the parents and other community members in participation in school activities is lowered by the misconception of the FFEP; this study recommends that the Ministry of Education Science and Technology needs to emphasize public awareness about free education to reduce misunderstanding within the community.

### Recommendations for Further Studies

Since this study employed both the qualitative and quantitative approaches in some aspects, it is advised that other researchers conduct the same study by using only one approach. Possibly, this can bring another insight into the problem. Also, the study was conducted in Songea municipality covering one ward only; a similar study can be done in other large areas to get results that can be generalized.

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**APPENDICES**

**Appendix 1: Muongozo wa usaili kwa Walimu wakuu na Waratibu Elimu Kata**

1. Je, unaweza kueleza hali ya ushiriki wa wazazi/jamii katika shughuli za shule tangu kumeanza kutekelezwa kwa tamko la kuondolewa kwa ada na michango mingine shuleni?
2. Je, mahudhurio ya wazazi kweye vikao yakoje? Je unadhani ni kitu gani kinaathiri mahudhurio?
3. Je, kuondolewa kwa ada na michango mingine katika shule za msingi za umma kumeathiri kwa namna yoyote wajibu wa wazazi /jamii katika kuwalea vijana wao ipasavyo? Ni kwa namna gani.
4. Je, kuondolewa kwa da na michango mingine mashuleni kumeathiri vipi ushiriki wa wazazi katika kusaidia ujifunzaji wa watoto wao wakiwa nyumbani?
5. Je, unadhani kuondolewa kwa ada na michango mingine katika shule za msingi kumeathiri kwa namna yoyote ushiriki wa wazazi katika ufanyaji na utekelezaji wa maamuzi ya masuala mbalimbali yahusuyo shule? Je, ni kwa namna gani?
6. Je, unadhani kuondolewa kwa ada na michango mingine mashuleni kumeathiri kwa namna yoyote hali ya wazazi / jamii kujitolea katika shughuli za maendeleo za shule? Je, ni kwa namna gani?
7. Je, unadhani mtazamo wa wazazi juu ya ushiriki wao katika shughuli za shule ukoje, hususani katika mazingira ya sasa ya kuondolewa kwa ada na michango mingine shuleni?
8. Je, una jambo lolote la ziada linalohusu swala la ushiriki wa wazazi katika maswala ya shule mbao ungependa kuongeza?

**Appendix 2: Muongozo wa Usaili kwa Wazazi**

1. Je, unaweza kueleza vipi juu ya ushiriki wako kama mzazi katika shughuli zinazohusu shule anayosoma mwanao tangu kutekelezwa kwa tamko la kuondolewa kwa ada na michango mingine shuleni?
2. Je, utadhani kuondolewa kwa ada na michango mingine katika shule za msingi za umma kumeathiri kwa namna yoyote ushiriki wenu wazazi katika kufanya na kutekeleza maamuzi yahusuyo maswala mbalimbali ya shule? Je, ni kwa namna gani?
3. Je, katika mwaka uliopita umehudhuria vikao vingapi shuleni? Je, mlifikia maamuzi yapi kwenye hivyo vikao? Je, ushiriki wako katika utekelezaji wa maamuzi hayo ya vikao hivyo ukoje?
4. Je, unadhani kuondolewa kwa ada na michango mingine katika shule za msingi za umma kumeathiri kwa namna gani wajibu wenu wazazi /jamii wa kuhamasisha vijana kupenda kujifunza shuleni? Je, ni kwa namna gani?
5. Je, ni mara ngapi umekagua madaftari ya mwanao katika mwezi uliopita? Je, ni kitu gani kinakufanya ukague / usikague madaftari ya mwanao kwa mara kwa mara?
6. Je, ni mara ngapi umewasiliana na walimu wa mwanao toka mwaka huu umeanza? Je, ni kitu gani kinakufanya uwasiliane / usiwasiliane na walimu mara kwa mara?
7. Je, unadhani kuondolewa kwa ada na michango mingine kumeathiri vipi ushiriki wako katika kusaidia ujifunzaji wa mtoto wako awapo nyumbani?
8. Je, ni lini mara yako ya mwisho kushiriki katika kujitolea kwenye shughuli za maendeleo ya shule anayosoma mwanao? Je ilikuwa ni shughuli gani? Je, ni kitu gani kinafanya ushiriki wako kuwa mdogo?
9. Nini mtazamo wako mzazi kuhusu uondoaji wa ada na michango shuleni ukiangazia ushiriki wako katika shughuli/masuala ya shule?
10. Je, unajambo lolote la ziada linalohusu swala la ushiriki wa wazazi katika masuala ya shule ambalo ungependa kuongoza?

**Appendix 3: Muongozo wa Majadiliano katika vikundi vya Walimu**

1. Kwa uzoefu wako, Je, hali ya ushiriki wa wazazi/jamii katika shughuli mbalimbali za shule ikoje?
2. Je, unazungumziaje ushiriki wa wazazi kwenye vikao? Je, unadhani hali hii imechangiwa kwa namna yoyote na sera ya elimu bure? Kwa nini?
3. Je, hali ya mawasiliano baina ya wazazi na walimu ikoje? Je, unadhani hali hii ya mawasiliano imechangiwa kwa namna yoyote na sera ya elimu bure? Je, ni kwa namna gani?
4. Je, unadhani kuondolewa kwa ada na michango mingine mashuleni kumeathiri kwa namna yoyote, ushiriki wa wazazi/jamii katika masuala mbalimbali ya shule? Je, ni kwa namna gani.
5. Je, ari ya wazazi kujutolea katika shughuli za maendeleo ya shule ikoje? Je, unadhani hali hii imechangiwa kwa vyoyote na sera ya sasa ya elimu bure? Je, ni kwa namna gani?
6. Je, mtizamo wa wazazi kuhusu ushiriki wao katika shughuli za shule ikoje, hususani katika mazingira ya sasa ya kuondolewa ada na michango mingine shuleni?
7. Je, unajambo lolote la ziada linalohusu swala la ushiriki wa wazazi katika masuala ya shule ambalo ungependa kuongezea?

**Appendix 4: Documentary Review Guide**

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **S/NO** | **Type of document** | **Information sought** | **Quotations** |
| 1. | Parental attendance register and Parental meeting minutes | Status of parents involvement |  |
| 2. | Parents volunteering register book | Parents volunteering in school activities |  |
| 3. | School committee minutes | Participation in decision making |  |
| 4. | Parents letters of comments | Parents/community support to school activities |  |
| 5. | Parents –teachers communication records | Parenting & learning at home |  |
| 6. | Parents contribution books | Parents /community support to school activities |  |

**Appendix 5: Interview Guide for Head teachers and Ward Education Officers**

1. Can you briefly explain the status of parents/community participation in school activities sine the implementation of free education declaration was effected?
2. How is the parents’ attendance in the meetings? What do you think affects attendance?
3. Do you think the elimination of school fees and other contributions in public primary schools have affected in any way the parents’ community role of taking care of that children? How
4. In which way, does the elimination of school fees and other contributions has affected parents’ role in supporting the learning of their children at home?
5. Do you think the elimination of school fees and other contribution in public primary schools has affected in any way parents’ involvement in making and implementing decisions related to school issues? How?
6. Do you think the elimination of school fees and other contribution in public primary schools has affected in any way parents/community volunteering in developmental activities of the school? How?
7. What do you think are the parents’ views regarding their participation in school activities especially in the current context of free education?
8. Do you have anything else that you would want to share as far as “parents/community involvement in schools matters” it concerned?

**Appendix 6: Interview Guide for Parents**

1. Can you briefly explain your involvement in school activities (your child’s school) since the introduction of free education policy?
2. Do you think the elimination of school fees and other contribution in public primary schools has affected in any way your involvement in making and implementing decisions related to school issues? How?
3. How many parental meetings did you attend at school last year? What resolutions were reached? How did you participate in the implementation of the resolutions reached?
4. Do you think the elimination of school fees and other contribution in public primary schools has affected in anyway your role as parents to sensitize youths to be vibrant on schooling? How?
5. How many times have you inspected the exercise books of your child last month? What always forces you to do or not do so?
6. How many times have you communicated with your child’s teachers since the commencement of this year? What forces/obstructs you to communicate with your child’s teachers?
7. In which ways, does the elimination of school fees and other contributions has affected your role as parent to support the learning of your children at home?
8. When did you lastly participate in developmental activities of your child’s schools? What was the activity you engaged? What lowers your participation?
9. Reflecting on you involvement in school activities as a parent, what are your views on the elimination of school fees and other contribution in public primary school?
10. Do you have anything else that you would want to share as far as “parents/community involvement in school’s matter’s convened?

**Appendix 7: Focus Group Discussion Guide for teachers**

1. As per your experience, what is the status of parents’/community involvement in varied school activities?
2. What is your common in parents? Participation in school parental meetings? Do you think the condition as any connection with the implementation of free education policy?
3. What is your comment in the communication between parents and teachers? Do you think the existing communication status between parents and teachers has been caused in any way by the implementation of free education policy? How?
4. Do you think the elimination of school fees and other contribution in primary schools has affected in any way the parents’ community involvement in school activities? How?
5. What is the status of parents’ motivation in volunteering in school’s developmental activities? Do you think their motivation status has been influenced in any way by the implementing their involvement policy? How?
6. Do you have anything else that you would want to share as far as “parent’ community involvement in school’s matters’ is concerned?

**Appendix 8: Documentary Review Guide**

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **S/N** | **Type of document** | **Information sought** | **Quotations** |
| 1. | Parental attendance register and Parental meeting minutes | Status of parents involvement |  |
| 2. | Parents volunteering register book | Parents volunteering in school activities |  |
| 3. | School committee minutes | Participation in decision making |  |
| 4. | Parents letters of comments | Parents/community support to school activities |  |
| 5. | Parents –teachers communication records | Parenting & learning at home |  |
| 6. | Parents contribution books | Parents /community support to school activities |  |

**Appendix 9: Letters of Clearance**

