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EDUCATION POLICIES IN KENYA: DOES FREE SECONDARY EDUCATION PROMOTE EQUITY IN PUBLIC SECONDARY SCHOOLS?

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ABSTRACT

Education is the basis upon which economic, social and political development of any nation is founded. Thus despite its high cost, goverments and households invest heavily in all forms of education. However, little is known about educational policies that promote equity in schooling across age and gender. This paper sheds light on the associations between gender, age, enrolment and the cost of secondary education using data from one county in Eastern Kenya. The results show that the cost of girls' school uniform is12% higher than that of boys, and there is a strong correlation between the cost of uniform and gender of the student (p<0.05). The cost of uniforms may be one source of observed differences in enrolments between girls and boys. We also show that costs differ by school types. In boarding schools, the unit cost of educating girls is higher than that for boys (the average cost in girls' schools is Ksh 52, 474 versus Ksh 49, 194 in boys'). However, the situation is reversed in day schools where the unit cost for boys is higher than that of girls (Ksh 31,323 versus Ksh 29,863). Further, although the cost of uniforms is lower for younger pupils, the cost for children aged 14-18 is the same but older children receive more pocket money from parents and guardians – a pattern observed in other countries. Generally, the unit cost of education negatively correlates with secondary school enrolment, suggesting that school fees may be a barrier to middle level education in countries where the burden of educating children is borne disproportionately more by households than by governments. Establishment of gender-and age-based subsidies for secondary education may be an effective mechanism for promotingequity in secondary education in Africa.

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INTRODUCTION

In Kenya, the cost of education is met by the government and household members. The public spending on education by the Government of Kenya is driven by the Sessional Paper No. 1 of 2005 on a Policy Framework for Education and Research and the Second Kenya Education Sector Support Programme (KESSP II) as well as by the Basic Education Act, 2013. This Act and the associated programmes, coupled by the direct and indirect benefits attributed to education prompted the government of Kenya to give education sector the highest public education allocation compared to other East African countries. For instance, in 2004-2005 and 2005-2006, the share of education expenditure in total government expenditure was 27% and 26%, respectively. However, it declined to 23.9% in 2008-2009 fiscal years.

In a bid to address illiteracy, low quality education, low completion rates at the secondary level, high cost of education and poor community participation the governemnt of Kenya launched Free Tuition Secondary Education (FTSE) in January 2008. The FSE was also established to increase transition from primary to secondary by 70% percent in all districts (Ohba, 2009). According to Free Secondary Education policy, the government meets the tuition fees of KShs 10,265 per student, while the parents meets other requirements like lunch, transport and boarding fees for those in boarding schools, besidesdevelopment projects. This was in line with the government commitment to ensure that regional special needs and gender disparities were addressed (Ohba, 2009). The earlier documents on government's commitment to meet the EFA and MDGs underscore the fact that the cost of secondary education is the main reason for the low transition

rate to secondary schools (Republic of Kenya, 2002b; MoEST, 2004, 2005) *Sessional Paper No.1 of 2005* by the then Ministry of Education Science and Technology (MoEST). With the introduction of Free Tuition Secondary Education, the cost of secondary education was expected to go down. However, despite the government intervention of making secondary education free in order to increase access to secondary education, the cost of education is still high because government schools continue to levy fees for lunch, school buildings and boarding equipment. Households are also expected to provide non-discretionary items such as school uniforms, sports uniforms, books, and stationary (Ohba, 2009) The absence of data regarding the *full* financial burden of secondary education on parents may lead to inability of the stakeholders of education to act accordingly when dealing with matters of education cost. The absence of accurate cost data is attributed to the earlier methods of establishing the unit cost of education where the focus was either on calculating government cost or household-borne cost. The two methods totally ignore the fact that education cost is borne by both by the household and the government. Given the major challenge of improving education under tight budgetary constraints, coupled with uproar by the civil society on this issue, parents and donors continue to seek clarification on the actual cost of education, especially in secondary schools. This study sought to determine how the full cost of education might be affecting equity in accessing secondary education in Kenya.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

This study was conducted in Tharaka South Sub-County between February and May 2015. Tharaka South sub-county is located in Eastern Kenya – one of the semi-arid parts of the country. The sample data was obtained from all the 25 school principals and 23,275 household heads in the study area. Interview schedule, questionnaire and document analysis were the main tools for data collection. Document analysis was used to obtain financial information from the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology and from the offices of the school principals on funds allocated to public schools. The questionnaire was used to collect data from the school principals directly. The calculation of the unit cost was done using the NTA methodology developed by Lee and Mason (2003). According to Lee (2003) the average cost of education per student is calculated by establishing the cost incurred by the household and the government on all items that are needed to educate a child. For the household cost, the following formula was used to arrive at unit cost:

$$UC = X_i + X_{ii} + X_{iii} + X_{iv} + X_{v} + X_{vi}$$

Where,
X_i = School uniform
X_{ii} = Transport cost
X_{iii} = Pocket money
X_{iv} = Motivation fees/ remedial tuition fee
X_v = Boarding fees
X_{vi} = Development fees and other levies

To calculate the direct social cost of education, the cost incurred by the government was categorized as a recurrent social cost (RSC) and capital social cost (CSC), which are both added together to give the total social cost (TSC) of education. The total social cost was then divided by the number of the students in that level of education to get the per capital education cost.

RESULTS

Through field observations and discussions with key informants it was established that the Free Secondary Education scheme implemented in 2008 attracted children who were past the age of secondary schooling. Mostly, according to the education system in Kenya children of age 14-18 are considered as the appropriate ages for children to be in secondary schools. Under normal circumstances children of above 18 years are supposed to have been registered in tertiary level of education. However, the results show that 38% of these children are still in secondary schools. The study further established that most of the older children who were in school were girls. This could be attributed to girls getting out of school due to early pregnancy and getting re-admitted after delivery. The study also established that at lower levels of secondary education, more girls were enrolled compared to the boys. For instance, in forms one and two, girls comprised 53% and 47%of the enrolment, respectively. However, to the contrary boys dominate girls in forms three and four at 56% and 44%, respectively. This implies that the dropout rate for the girls' is higher than that of the boys. This could be attributed to early marriages, female genital mutilation rituals, and household chores (Mutegi, 2005; Reche, 2014).

Transport cost

On transport cost the study established that on average girls pay slightly higher transport cost than boys. The mean cost for the girls was Ksh 3,186 for the period of twelve months or three school terms translating to Ksh 1,062 per school term. The boys spent Ksh 3,100 in a year on school transport. The results further indicate that the minimum amount of transport cost paid by the boys was Ksh300 and girls Ksh200. The highest amount of transport cost paid by the boys was Ksh 18, 000 or Ksh 6,000 per term while the girls who paid the highest transport cost was Ksh, 19,000 equivalent to Ksh 6,333 per term. In relation to the type of school, the mean transport cost for the students in day schools is lower than the mean transport cost for those in boarding schools. The students in day schools on average spend Ksh 1,547 and those in Boarding schools spend Ksh 3,501. This gives a variation of Khs 1,954; this difference can be associated to the distance from home to school. Students in boarding schools cover long distances (28 kilometers) while those in day schools cover 12 kilometers on average. This therefore implies that, children in boarding schools incur more transport cost to access secondary education every year compared to those in day schools. The correlation results indicate that there was a relationship between the distance from home and enrolment (p<0.05). This correlation is in line with the findings by Fentiman *et al*, (1999) who established that distance to school is a significant determinant of educational access. This situation is common in areas where there are more primary schools than junior highs schools, with senior secondary schools being considerably farther. The distances to the latter schools are considered too far for younger children, especially girls (Juneja, 2001).

This is also true in the cases of older girls and those children regarded by parents as vulnerable to sexual harassment (Colclough *et al.*, 2000). The study also established that there was a negative correlation between the school category and the transport cost (r=-.246, N=293; p<0.001). This implies that children in sub-county schools pay less transport than their counterparts in schools outside the county.

The cost of school uniforms

On school uniforms, the study shows that girls' uniform is more costly than the boys' uniform. On average a girl spends Ksh 5,094.73 and the boys Ksh 4,035.75 on uniforms every year. This constitutes an average of 12% higher costs for the girls compared to the boys or Ksh 1059 per year. The correlation results indicates that there was a very strong correlation between gender and school uniform (r=824, N=401; p<0.001). The results suggest that parents who have girls in secondary schools spend more money on uniform compared to the parents with the boys in the same locality. Regarding the age of the students and school uniform cost, the study reveals that parents with children of age 13 spend less money on school uniforms compared to other children in other age groups. However, at age 14-18 years, parents spend almost the same amount on uniforms. After age 18, uniform cost sharply goes down up to age 19 and then increases to Ksh 6,500 at the age of 23. The correlation results show that there is a positive and strong correlation between the age of the students and cost of school uniform (r=858, N=401; p<0.001). This suggests that younger students spend less money to buy school uniforms compared to what older children spend.

In line with type of school, the study indicates that students in boarding schools spend more money on uniforms than those in day schools. The students in day schools on average spend Ksh 4,143 on school uniforms compared to Ksh 4,779 for those in boarding schools. This implies that children in boarding schools pays on average 8% higher on school uniforms compared to the children in day schools. The cost of school uniforms varies with class of the student. The study established that parents who have children in form one pay more on uniform compared to those in other classes. On average a student in form 1 spent Ksh 5,375 on uniforms compared to parents in form 2 who spent Ksh 4,706; in form 3 who spent Ksh 3,917 and in form 4 Ksh 4,325. The form 1 uniform cost is up-scaled by cost for school games uniform and the aspect of buying more pairs of uniform. On school uniform, the study established that there is a positive correlation between school uniform and enrolment. These results on uniform correspond with the findings of a committee constituted to establish the cost of uniform in Melbourne Australia (2007) which showed that parents with girls in secondary school spend more money on uniform than the parents of the boys.

Pocket money 'cost'

Pocket money is also considered as a direct cost of schooling. The study shows that girls receive more money from parents as pocket money compared to boys. On average girls receive Ksh2, 783 as pocket money for the whole year and boys Ksh2, 500. However, the results show that boys receive as much as

Ksh18, 000 and girls the high of Ksh 12,000. This translates to Ksh 6,000 per term for the boys and 4,000 for the girls. The pocket money varies by the age of the students, the results indicate pocket money increases by the age of the students. However, at from age 16, pocket money starts fluctuating with the peak at age 22 where children were given Ksh 4,250 as pocket money. Further analysis indicates that, there is a wide difference between the pocket money given to students in boarding schools and those in day schools. The results show that students in boarding schools on average receive Ksh, 3,010 per year compared to those in day schools who get Ksh 1,534. Pocket money varies by class level of the students, on average students in form one are given around Ksh2, 000 per term and those in form 2 are given Ksh 2,500, while form 3 students get Ksh2, 700 and form 4 pupils get Ksh3, 100. This pattern shows that pocket money varies by the level of class whereby students in senior classes get more pocket money than pupils in junior classes. Regarding the relationship between pocket money and the age of the student, the study shows that the two are uncorrelated. This corresponds to the study by Bonke (2013) who shows that the amount of pocket money given by the parents or guardian to secondary school students does no vary by absolute age of the learner but by the age category. His study indicates that children aged 7-11 received pocket amounting to DKK 123 per month (1 EUR=7.45 DKK), while those of age 12-17 on average received DKK 321. The amount given is a little greater for girls aged 12-17 than for boys.

Motivation fee

In Kenya, motivation fee is the amount of money paid by the parents in order to pay teachers who conduct remedial classes. The study shows that parents with girls in secondary schools pay more money for motivation fees compared to parents with boys. For the boys on average parents pay Ksh 2,023 while for the girls they pay Ksh 2,329 per year. The results further indicate that motivation fees increase by class level. The results show that at form 1 on average parents pay Ksh 1,795 per year; at form 2 Ksh 2,150, at form 3 Ksh 2,626 and at form 4 ksh 2,857.

Conclusions

The study established that in as much as the government is trying to promote equity by giving equivalent amount of money Kshs 10,265 to every child who is in secondary school, the money is too little to sustain a child in secondary schools. In a bid to meet the shortfall the schools compel parents to pay additional fees in form of motivation fees, boarding fees, building fees, among other payments. The study reveals that there is a huge variance between the amount of money that the government budgets for secondary education and the cost incurred by the parents to educate their children. We have also established that this cost varies by gender and age of the child. The study shows that the unit cost of education for girls in secondary is higher for girls for items such as uniforms, pocket money, and transport. The study shows a strong negative correlation between unit cost of education met by the household and enrolment (r = -0.834, N=333; p<0.001). This finding suggests private schooling costs discourage enrolment, watering down the equity philosophy of the government that is

basis for a capitation of Ksh10, 265 for every child enrolled in secondary school. However, regarding the government spending, the study shows that a positive correlation exists between the average government expenditure on each child in school and enrolment (r=0.744, N=327 and p<0.001), implying that as the government spends more money on education, the number of students enrolling in schools keeps on increasing. This finding reveals that public spending on education promotes secondary school enrolment, and may also improve gender and age-related equity in schooling because it enables girls and overage children to enroll and remain in school.

Recommendations

- The study has revealed that households on average spend Ksh 5,375 on uniforms especially in form one. This study recommends that in order to promote equity, the government or other educational stakeholders should buy school uniforms for needy children in secondary schools.
- Day schools are less costly than boarding schools. This study recommends that more day schools be constructed in order to reduce the distance from homesteads to schools, but the cost-effectiveness of such schools also needs to be established to ensure that they deliver quality education.
- Generally, parents incur higher cost on form one education than in other classes; this cost is elevated by school uniforms and other entry fees. In order to give equal chance to all children to enroll in secondary school, there is need for the Government to heavily subsidize form one fees

- Girls pay more than the boys in boarding schools. This study recommends that girls' education be subsidized at higher level than boys'.
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