

Relationship between Local Culture, Parental Support, and Effective Implementation of Free Secondary Education in Njoro Sub-County, Kenya

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Abstract

Formal education is a core correlate for successful development processes in a nation, which explains why the Government of Kenya introduced Free Secondary Education (FSE) in 2008. This initiative was motivated by the need to enhance access and retention in the sub-sector. It has, nonetheless been observed that challenges relating to unfavourable cultural practices and inadequate parental support are impacting negatively on the programme. However, empirical evidence to validate this claim is either scanty or where available not well articulated. Using ex post facto research design, data was collected from 30 public secondary school principals using a self-administered questionnaire and subsequently analysed through simple regression statistic at .05 alpha level. Local culture ($R = .723$; $p < .05$) and parental support ($R = .895$; $p < .05$) were linearly correlated with effective implementation of the programme. The two independent variables generated R^2 values of .523 and .801 respectively. This implies that local culture and parental support accounted for 52% and 80% in regard to variation in effective implementation of FSE. The study offers useful insights on how the two challenges can be addressed with a view to actualizing the goals envisaged in the FSE initiative.

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Introduction

Formal education plays an important role in regard to individual and national development. This observation is grounded on the fact that the process of schooling

enhances people's capacity to improve their well-being and participate effectively in nation building (Psacharopoulos & Woodhall, 1985; Sifuna, 1990).

The foregoing intimates that a county's pace of development is contingent upon level of investment in formal education. This undoubtedly explains why the Government of Kenya places a high premium on education and training. This is reflected in sustained public spending on education which averaged at 20% of total government expenditure between 2008 and 2011 (World Bank, 2011).

One of the critical determinants of successful human capital formation in a country is access to quality learning at the lower levels of the education system. In Kenya, the lower level or basic education for that matter comprises three subsystems: Pre-primary, primary and secondary cycles (Republic of Kenya, 2013). The education is meant to prepare learners for further education and training in post-secondary institutions. In this regard, secondary schools in Kenya are perceived as the best placed institutions for laying the foundation for the development of human resources capable of contributing positively to the country's development process (Republic of Kenya, 2012). This largely accounts for increased public spending in secondary education which stood at 58% of GNP per capital year 2010 (Republic of Kenya, 2011).

Similar to other levels of education, secondary education in Kenya has experienced increased linear expansion since independence in 1963. For instance, enrolment rose from 30,120 students in 1962 to 882,000 students in 2003 representing nearly 3000% increase in four decades (Kiumi, 2013). In 2006, secondary school enrolment stood at 1,030,000 students (Republic of Kenya, 2007a).

It needs to be mentioned that expansion of secondary education had begun to weigh heavily on the exchequer by the end of the first two decades after independence. Consequently, the government was compelled to introduce cost sharing policy in 1988 in which, parents were to meet the cost of text books, stationery equipment and consumables (Gogo & Othuon, 2006). The cost-sharing strategy however was an antithesis as far as access to secondary education is concerned. This is because, the policy turned up to be an access barrier as the sub-sector came to be characterized by high dropout rate and poor performance in Kenya Certificate of Secondary Education (KCSE) exit examination (Republic of Kenya, 2006). The most affected were children from low-income households.

Education is the greatest social equalizer in the sense that apart from increasing ones income, it has a positive additive effect on an individual's upward mobility in the society (Psacharopoulos & Woodhall, 1985; Chiuri & Kiumi, 2005). In this regard, the cost-sharing financing strategy, denied learners from low-income households'

opportunities for further education and training and by implication, gainful occupation in life. This was tantamount to promoting social apartheid in favour of the rich which in the long run would have generated social instability in the country.

To reverse the declining trend in access to secondary education, the government introduced Free Secondary Education (FSE) programme in 2008. The FSE initiative was a two-pronged strategy. On the one hand, it aimed at forestalling demands on parents; a factor that the government envisaged would improve students' attendance, progression and transition to post-secondary institutions. On the other hand, the strategy was predicted on the conviction that it would enable the country to produce human resources capable of pushing its growth agenda of becoming a middle level economy by 2030 (Republic of Kenya, 2007b).

Although the FSE drive was a step in the right direction, it has been pointed out that the programme's objectives may not be fully realized due to unfavourable cultural beliefs and practices, and low level of parental support. Some of the most cited cultural based risk factors include gender preferences in favour of boys, early marriages, female genital mutilation, and child labour. (Maina, 2014). The net effect of these cultural manifestations is intermittent school attendance by students, repetition, and poor performance, dropout and gender disparity (in favour of boys) in regard to education participation at the secondary cycle of education (Kiumi, 2013). This scenario, it has

been observed represents wastage of public resources invested in this cycle of the country's education system (Chiuri & Kiumi, 2005).

In principle, the FSE programme is financed by the exchequer. In this funding regime, the government allocates Ksh. 10, 265 to each student per annum for meeting the cost of tuition, operation and general improvement of schools. Parents, on the other hand are expected to shoulder the responsibility of their children's uniform and lunch in day schools and residence cost in boarding schools (Ministry of Education, 2008). However, to most parents, FSE was a welcome reliever from the burden of contributing to their children's education. Due to this attitude, some parents have abdicated their responsibility in regard to their children's education, thereby denying a number of schools the much needed homeschool partnership (Kweyu, 2009). Failure by parents to appreciate their role expectations in the FSE programme may have detrimental effects on the desired learning outcomes in our secondary cycle of education. This in light of the fact that besides meeting the noted non-tuition demands, parents are expected to effectively play their role expectations in areas relating to their children's character and academic development (McNeil \ Partin, 2005; Dean, 2001). Therefore, the assumption by parents that FSE is Government's responsibility in toto could be undermining the envisaged learning outcomes in Kenya's secondary schools.

Review of Related Literature

The most widely used measure of success in formal schooling is learner's cognitive gains. This refers to knowledge and skills gained by learners as measured through formal examinations at the end of the learning process or point of learners' departure to subsequent levels of learning or labour market (Early, 1998; Clarkson, 1991). It needs to be acknowledged that χ level of learning achievement is dependent on learner's level of curriculum mastery as he/she progresses through the learning system. There are two correlates of effective mastery of competencies targeted by a school curriculum: learner's cultural background, and level of parental involvement in a child's education. The influence of the two factors on learning achievement forms the core of discussion herein below.

Learners' Cultural Background

Generally speaking, the term culture denotes the integrated system of learned behaviour which is characteristic of members of a particular ethnic or cultural group for that matter (Hofstede, 1997). Culture is basically rooted in a group's traditions and customary practices.

It needs to be mentioned that culture is central to the way individuals view, perceive and engage with all aspects of their lives, including education. Thus, in a society where formal education is accorded a high premium, parents are more likely to invest their

time, energy and financial resources in their children's education. This may impact positively on school attendance, learning gains and learners' motivation to rise up the social ladder (Muir, 1994).

In a social milieu where priorities, perceptions and core values are at variance with formal education, school attendance and by implication students learning achievement may be undermined. This is in light of the fact that retrogressive cultural practices such as FGM, marrying off of young girls and child labour may take the centre stage. Such cultural tendencies tend to send wrong signals to children as far as formal education is concerned (Legget, 2005; Mlama, 2005). This is because, an individuals' culture and upbringing has a profound effect not only on how he/she sees the world but also the way the individual processes information. This has the implication that children brought up in a cultural environment where formal education is relegated to the periphery are likely to have a low attitude towards learning. This may trigger the twin problem of dropout and repetition, in addition to suppressed motivation to achieve among learners (Kituyi, 1990).

Parental Support in a Learning System

For all intents and purposes, schools are social organizations whose principal participants are teachers, students and parents. The latter are key allies in a child's education. This is because they are not only principal agents of socialization but also providers of child's material needs in a school (Rose, *et al*, 1978; Pugh, 1989). Moreover, parents' attitude towards their children's education is one of the factors most closely associated with the relative school achievement of learners (Reid, 1986). Indeed, Mishra (2012) has rightly observed that parental involvement in a child's education helps to broaden the child's horizon, enhances social relationships and provides a sense of self-esteem and self-efficacy. Several studies render support to this observation. For instance, parental involvement has been associated with higher grade point averages (Gutman and Midgley, 2000). Rumberger (1995) also established that parental involvement is negatively related to dropout rate among learners.

It is also worthwhile to mention that there are also several mutual benefits that accrue from a strong school/home partnership. First, teachers understand their learners better, generate unique rather than routine solutions to classroom problems, and reach a shared understanding with parents and learners (Dean, 2001; Reid, 1986). Second, parents who are involved in their children's education develop a greater appreciation of their role expectations in a school (McBride, 1991).

While the value of home/school linkage is universally accepted, it is not always easy to maintain a good working relationship. This is because of the tendency by educators to be dismissive of parents' potential for assisting a school to attain its goals, lack of awareness by parents on their role in a school and a general feeling that since they are non-professionals, they have little to offer on educational matters (Crozer, 2000, Pugh 1989; Laboke, 2000).

The foregoing intimates that sustained efforts should be made to address hindrances to school/home linkages. This is the most effective way of nurturing productive engagement between parents and teachers. First, schools should view parents as clients or customers rather than outsiders. Second, schools have an obligation to sensitize parents on their role expectations in a child's education. Third, school/home association should be a two-way communication and as a matter of fact, should reflect a co-equal partnership (Vuzi, 2012). Thus, parents' views on ways to improve school outcomes should be valued by educators (head teachers and teachers). These initiatives are more likely to match teachers and parents views and values. Such a consonance has a motivational value to educators and parents, a factor that may lead to increased student achievement (Kiumi 2008).

Drawing from what has been captured in the introduction and literature review sections of the study, it was premised that negative cultural beliefs and practices and

low levels of parental support could be impacting negatively on the FSE programme. Although this presumption seems plausible, there is paucity of empirical evidence to support this view. This is the gap that this study undertook to fill.

Two objectives were set out with a view to fulfilling the task. The two objectives were stated as follows:

1. To find out whether there is any statistically significant relationship between local culture and effective implementation of FSE in Njoro sub-county.
2. To determine whether there is any statistically significant relationship between level of parental support and effective implementation of FSE in Njoro sub-county.

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

The hypotheses were stated thus:-

HO₁: There is no statistically significant relationship between local culture and effective implementation of FSE in Njoro sub-county.

HO₂: There is no statistically significant relationship between level of parental support and effective implementation of FSE in Njoro sub-county.

Conceptual Framework

The study was grounded in the reasoning that as the core implementers of the FSE programme, principals are the best placed individuals to report on the extent to which

cultural beliefs and practices, and level of parental support (independent variables) could be influencing implementation of the programme in their respective schools (dependent variable). The study further postulated that principals' perception of the relationship between the aforesaid variables was likely to be influenced (either positively or negatively) by two extraneous variables: level of teacher commitment to students' learning and quality of students' guidance and counselling in a school.

Based on the foregoing cognition, the study presumed that even in a situation where local cultural beliefs and practices and parental support are not favourable, a principal may not perceive such a scenario as a serious challenge if levels of teacher dedication to their teaching tasks and students motivation through quality guidance and counselling are high. The converse is the case. Marczyk, DeMatteo, and Festinger (2005) have averred that extraneous variables have the potential of generating rival/completing hypotheses that might explain the results of a study, thereby confounding its internal validity. In this regard, the study controlled the two extraneous variables by selecting all principals (n=30) in the 30 public secondary schools in the study area. This ensured that all principals in the study area participated in the study irrespective of level of teacher commitment to instructional duties and quality of students' guidance and counselling. The conceptualized relationship between the independent, dependent, and extraneous variables subsumed in the study is summarized schematically in Figure 1 below.

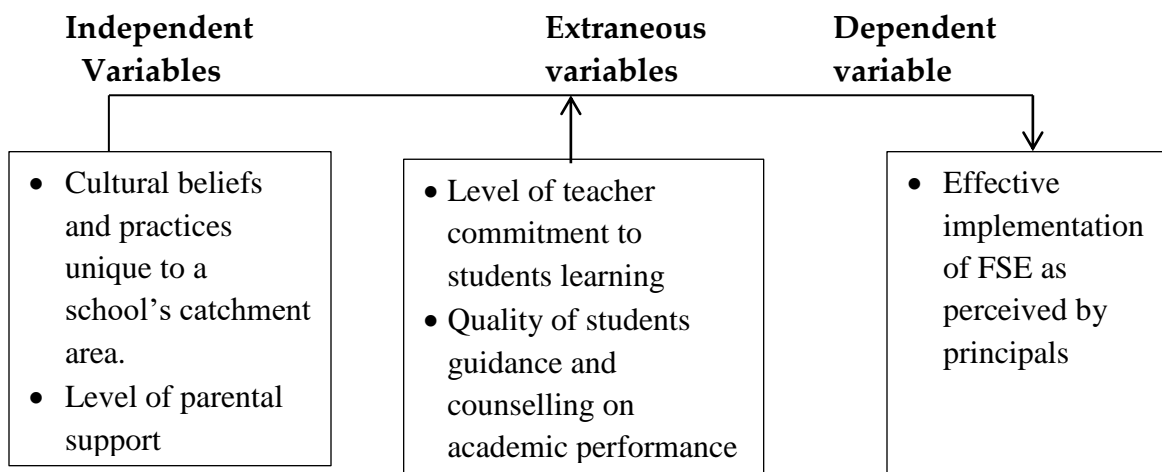


Figure 1: Hypothesized Relationship between Variables Subsumed in the Study

Research Approach

The study utilized descriptive research design of the *ex-post facto* type. This design is utilized in a situation whereby the independent and dependent variables have already interacted. Therefore, the investigator cannot manipulate the independent variable(s) with a view to determining its/their effect on the dependent variable(s). In this regard, the effect of the interaction between the independent and dependent variables is determined retrospectively (Kerlinger, 1986).

The design was deemed ideal in light of the fact that the study sought to establish retrospectively the extent to which local culture and parental support (independent variables) were influencing implementation of FSE (dependent variable) from principals' point of view.

Instrumentation

Data was collected through a questionnaire which was self-administered by respondents. The questionnaire was personally delivered to the 30 public secondary schools in the study area. The option to self-deliver the questionnaire was preferred on the basis of the reasoning that it would enable the researchers to establish rapport with the respondents, explain the purpose of the study and clarify issues that may be unclear in the instrument (Best & Kahn, 1993). This approach to data collection generated a 100% response rate.

The questionnaire had two sections labelled A and B. Section A gathered respondents' characteristics, specifically gender, headship experience and longevity in their current schools. Section B had 30 five- point Likert Scale items on challenges accruing from negative cultural beliefs and practices, and parental support in regard to implementation of FSE programme. Response categories in the items ranged from "definitely true" to "definitely not true". Respondents were requested to select by ticking (✓) the option that best described their opinion or perception for that matter.

Reliability and Validity of the Instrument

When a concept has been operationally defined, it means that a measure of it has been proposed. Therefore, the ensuing measurement device should be both reliable and valid so as to measure the concept accurately (Bryman& Cramer, 1997). It needs to be

mentioned that estimation of the two measures has inherent challenges in social science research. This is primarily because, unlike physical scientists, social scientists tend to disagree about the meaning of concepts used to describe human behaviour (Peil, 1995). In spite of this challenge, Mugenda and Mugenda (1999) have observed that effort must be expended by the researcher to ensure that the instrument he/she intends to use in measuring the concept of interest is both reliable and valid.

Reliability has two aspects- external and internal reliability. The former denotes the degree of consistency over a measure over time. In other words, it is a measure of the extent to which an instrument is capable of generating similar results when used more than once to gather data from a given sample under consistent conditions (Wiersma, 1995; Brown, (1996). This aspect of reliability was estimated through test-retest technique whereby the instrument was administered to 3 randomly selected public secondary school principals in the neighbouring Molo sub-county and subsequently administered to the same subjects after three weeks. Scores from the two instrument administration conditions generated a correlation coefficient of $R = .81$ (or 81%). This implies that the instrument's external reliability was high since the items were "hanging together".

Internal reliability is particularly critical when using a multiple- item scale. It addresses the question of the extent to which the scale is measuring a single idea (or construct for

that matter) and hence whether the items in the instrument are internally consistent. The instrument's internal reliability was determined using Cronbach's alpha. The objective was to assess whether items in the instrument were really measuring principals' perceptions on the extent to which local culture and parental support were influencing implementation of FSE. The alpha obtained was .81 (or 81%) which implied that the instrument was consistent in measuring the targeted principals' perceptions 81% of the time and that error may have occurred 19% of the time. This intimates that the instrument's internal reliability level was high (Marczyk et al, 2005).

Validity is a measure of the degree to which an instrument measures what it claims or purports to measure (Brown, 1996). In other words, it is an estimation of the extent to which items in an instrument represent the universe or domain being investigated (Key, 2002). Validity estimation is, therefore crucial since it determines whether or not the concept under exploration will be estimated accurately. In this regard, estimation of the instrument's content validity was of utmost interest.

To validate the instruments' content validity, five Laikipia university lecturers in the department of curriculum and educational management, and educational practitioners (specifically five secondary school principals in Molo sub-county) were requested to identify content areas to be captured in the instrument. Based on the lecturers and practitioners expert opinion, extensive literature search was carried out on the

suggested content areas. This made it possible to discern areas that had to be captured at the itemization phase of the instrument. Furthermore, utmost care was taken to ensure that the items were prepared in line with the objectives of the study.

Data Analysis

Nominal scale data in regard to principals' gender, headship experience and longevity in their schools were analysed through frequency counts and percentages. Ordinal data, specifically data from the multiple-item Likert Scale were analysed by use of simple regression statistic with a view to determining the truth or falsity of the two null hypotheses which were germane to the study.

Results and Discussion

The results herein are discussed in relation to respondents' characteristics and hypotheses testing.

Respondents' Characteristics

An overwhelming majority of principals (77%) were males while 23% were females. This indicates that male principals were overrepresented in the schools covered by the study. Male domination (or adrocentricity) of educational management has been noted in other studies in Kenya (e.g. Gachoki, 2006, Ng'ang'a, 2012). This phenomenon has been associated with the "male" image of management whereby management is

perceived as a field that is less appealing to women (Bush, 2013). This perception is predicated on the belief that management demands masculine traits such as aggressiveness, domination, and competition rather than feminine behavioural characteristics, e.g. shared problem solving, negotiation, consensus building, and collaboration (Alkhalifa, 1992). On the contrary, Hall (1999) argues that the association between management and masculinity has not been established as a fact. Therefore, perpetuating this traditional stereotype serves to discriminate women in the allocation of leadership positions in the education field, a factor that may impact negatively on girl child education due to lack of role models in educational leadership (Sifuna & Chege, 2006).

Fifteen (50%) of the principals had worked as school heads for a period ranging between 6-10 years. They were followed by their counterparts who had been in headship position for less than six years (33%). Four principals (13%) had worked in their current position for more than 20 years while only 1 (4%) was in the 11-15 years of headship experience bracket.

The observed headship experience profile has the implication that at the time of data collection (2013), two-thirds of respondents were already working as principals at the inception of FSE in 2008. In this regard, it can be reasoned that the study participants had requisite information on the link between local culture, parental support, and effective implementation of FSE.

Over half of principals (53%) had headed their current schools for a period ranging between 6-10 years, followed by those who had worked as head teachers in their present schools for less than six years. Only 3 principals (10%) had led their current schools for more than 10 years. On the whole, it can be learnt that nearly two thirds of principals had managed their schools for more than five years. This has the implication that majority of principals who took part in the study were heading their schools when the FSE initiative was effected in 2008. This seems to indicate that the participants had reliable information on the extent to which prevalent cultural beliefs and practices, and level of parental support were influencing effective implementation of FSE in their schools.

Results of Hypotheses Testing

The study tested two hypotheses using simple regression statistic. The results of testing the two hypotheses are presented below.

H₀₁: There is no statistically significant relationship between local culture and effective implementation of FSE in Njoro sub-county.

Table 1 summarizes the results of simple regression analysis with respect to H_{01} .

Table 1

Regression Analysis Summary between Local Culture and Effective Implementation of FSE

Variable		R	R ²	df	F	p-value
Dependent	Effective Implementation of FSE	.723	0.5228	5,24	7.04	.000*
Independent	Prevalent Local culture	(β) .0421	regression coefficient .3037	16.087	t	.000*

*significant at $p < .05$

The data in Table 1 shows that local culture was significantly correlated ($\beta = .0421$; $p < .05$) with effective implementation of FSE. It is also notable that the computed F-value was statistically significant ($F=7.04$; $P < .05$). The two statistical indices indicate that the local culture and effective implementation of FSE were linearly related and that the relationship was significant. The generated R^2 value of .05228 further implies that 52% of total variation in effective implementation of FSE in the study area was linked to variance in local culture. Thus, unfavourable cultural practices were lowering schools capacity to realize the goals targeted by the FSE programme by 52%. This observation also intimates that if local cultural beliefs and practices are aligned with the goals targeted in FSE, schools capacity to implement the programme may increase by 52%.

Proceeding from the foregoing, it can be reasoned that H_{01} was not tenable. In this regard, the hypothesis was rejected and conclusion made that local culture and effective

implementation of the FSE programme were not statistically independent. This has the implication that local culture was a reliable predictor of effective implementation of the FSE programme in terms of enhancing access to secondary education, quality of learning, retention, and transition of students to post-secondary institutions.

H₀₂: There is no statistically significant relationship between level of parental support and effective implementation of FSE in Njoro sub-county. Table 2 summarizes the results of simple regression analysis with respect to H₀₂.

Table 2
Regression Analysis Summary between Parental Support and Effective Implementation of FSE

Variable	R	R ²	df	F	p-value
Dependent effective Implementation of FSE	.895*	0.801	3,26	192.4	.000*
Dependent Level of Parental support	of (β)	regression coefficient	10.630	t	.000*
	.1025	.0136			

*significant at $p < .05$

From the data displayed in Table 2, it is clear that parental support had a significant linear relationship with effective implementation of FSE ($\beta = .1025$; $P < .05$). The Table in addition reveals that the generated F-value was statistically significant ($F = 192.4$; $p < .05$). The two statistical indices suggest that there was a significant linear relationship between parental support and effective implementation of FSE. The resultant R² value of .801 further implies that parental support accounted for 80.1% of total variation in

implementation of FSE. This seems to suggest that a reduction in level of parental support was lowering schools' capacity to implement the FSE programme by 80.1%. This finding also implies that an increase in level of parental support will increase schools capacity to realize the gains envisaged in the FSE programme by 80.1%.

Based on the foregoing observations, H_{02} was rejected and conclusion made that parental support and implementation of FSE were not statistically independent. This has the implication that parental support was a reliable predictor of the degree to which effective implementation of FSE would be realized by schools in the study area.

The noted magnitude of linkage between parental support and effective implementation of FSE is consistent with a study by Ng'ang'a (2012). The study observed that principals in high-parental support schools were relatively more satisfied with FSE implementation in their institutions compared with their counterparts in low-parental support schools.

Summary of the Findings and Conclusions

1. Majority of principals (77%) were males. This implies that there was no gender parity in appointment into principals' posts in the study area at the time the study was carried out in 2013.

2. Two thirds (67%) of respondents had worked as principals for more than five years. This indicates that majority of respondents had already been appointed to headship positions at the time the FSE programme was initiated. This implies that a sizeable proportion of principals who participated in the study had requisite information pertaining to the influence of local culture and parental support on effective implementation of the FSE programme
3. Sixty three percent of respondents were in charge of their schools for more than five years at the commencement of data collection. In this regard, it can be concluded that nearly two-thirds of respondents had a background that could be relied upon in regard to the link between local culture, parental support, and effective implementation of FSE.
4. Local culture was not only significantly related with effective implementation of FSE, but also accounted for 52% of total variation in effective implementation of FSE. This implies that local culture was a reliable predictor of the extent to which schools in the study could effectively implement the FSE programme. In other words, favourable cultural beliefs and practices may impact positively on FSE implementation while the converse will be the case.
5. Parental support was similarly linearly correlated with effective implementation of FSE. Moreover, 80% variation in effective implementation of FSE, the study revealed was linked to variation in level of parental support. This indicates that

there was a direct relationship between level of parental support and effectiveness in FSE implementation.

Recommendations

Findings generated by the study have important implications and lessons in regard to FSE implementation in Kenya. A major observation is that actualization of goals envisaged in the programme is contingent upon change of cultural values in favour of formal education and enhanced parental support towards secondary schools in the country. Based on this observation, the paper draws a number of recommendations with a view to enhancing implementation of FSE in the area focused by the study and by implication other parts of the country.

First, sustained effort should be made by relevant stakeholders (e.g. national and County Government, Faith Based Organizations, and teachers) towards changing factors and conditions that could be generating cultural beliefs and practices that are at variance with the goals envisaged in the FSE programme. For instance, communities need to be sensitized through public fora and parent-school conferences on the value of secondary education.

Second, opportunities for accessing post-secondary education and training should be expanded so as to reassure communities that their children's future in regard to post-secondary education is secured, and by implication gainful occupation in life. Added to this is the need to increase employment opportunities in the formal and informal sectors for secondary and post-secondary graduates. These initiatives will undoubtedly convince communities that investing in formal education is the best way to secure their childrens' future.

Third, it is important to point out that the foregoing measures are likely to have a positive additive effect on parent-school partnership. This observation is premised on the fact that when parents realize that secondary education has positive returns, they are likely to be more committed to their childrens' education. However, to sustain this motivation, schools need to sensitize parents on their role expectations. This can be realized through well-structured school-parent conferences in which educators formally interact with parents. Through such engagements, parents will appreciate the fact that their children's success in secondary education is contingent upon the amount of material and non-material resources they invest in formal education. This linkage will undoubtedly generate the desired parental impact in the system whose additive value to learners' achievement in the FSE cannot be overstated.

Ethical Consideration

Three elements of ethical considerations were deemed critical in this study. These were: respondents' consent, anonymity and confidentiality. Respondents consent to participate in the study was achieved by informing them that they were under no compulsion to take part in the study. Anonymity and confidentiality on the other hand were accomplished by informing respondents in writing that they should not write their names or that of their schools on any part of the questionnaire. Moreover, in the opening part of the questionnaire, respondents were clearly informed that the information they would provide in the questionnaire would not only be treated with utmost confidentiality but would be used only for the purpose of research they were to participate in.

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