

Success and constraints of fees-free education policy in enhancing access to quality primary education in Ilala and Moshi rural districts

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This study examined the success and constraints of the recently introduced Fees-Free Primary Education (FFPE) policy in enhancing access to quality primary education in Tanzania. The study was conducted in Ilala and Moshi Rural districts. The purpose of this study was to explore the stakeholders' perceptions of partner involvement areas in implementing the fees-free education policy, establish the preparedness of the government and schools in adopting the policy; assess the impact of the policy on enhancing access to quality primary education; and determine the challenges to the effective provision of fee-free education and uncover the strategies to overcome them. The study employed a mixed method research approach. Specifically, it applied a concurrent-triangulation design. Data were collected using questionnaires, interviews, observation, FGDs and documentary review. In all, 120 respondents were involved in the data collection process comprising 2 DEOs, 6 HTs, 64 teachers, 36 pupils and 12 parents selected using purposive and simple random sampling techniques. Quantitative and qualitative data analysis was done using SPSS version 20 and content analysis, respectively. The study was guided by an adapted open systems model (Hoy & Miskel, 2008). The model assisted in examining the flow of resources from the government to facilitate the process of enhancing access to quality primary education. The study found that apart from increasing access to primary education, fee-free education also had impacted on the quality of education provided by improving teaching staff remuneration and in-service training. On the other hand, the implementation faced many challenges such as the shortage of teachers, poor learning environment and shortage of teaching and learning materials including books, which are essential in providing quality education. The findings imply that the policy has faced problems in its supply-driven policies, unclear mechanisms, and declining quality of education. Moreover, the fees abolition policy has resulted in low levels of material provision and overall low levels of pupil achievement. Thus, the study recommends for the government to employ non-teaching staff, pass laws that govern operations, include stakeholders in policy formulation and facilitation of the schools' establishment of income generating projects through production units. Also, a similar study should be carried out with a wider scope and geographical reach.

