

The Role of Political Leaders in Influencing the Award of Bursary Funds in Wareng District, Kenya

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Abstract

Bursary funds are not fairly distributed to needy students to enable them pay their fee balances in public boarding secondary schools. This paper was based on a study that sought to investigate the role of political leaders in influencing the award of bursary funds in Wareng district in Rift Valley Province. A descriptive survey research design guided the study. 200 form four, needy students, identified by head teachers, participated in this study. Ten head teachers, a secretary and chairman of each of the 4 locations and constituency were purposively. Four locations, 30% of the 14 locations in the district, were sampled randomly. Questionnaires and interviews schedules were used to collect data. Data analysis was done using descriptive statistical techniques such as percentages and frequencies. The study established that there was political influence in bursary allocation. The recommendations of this study were that there is need to establish a legal framework to be followed when awarding bursaries to the needy students, the government should increase the amount of bursary funds and bursary disbursement should be done fairly. The findings of this study could be used by policy makers to solve the problem of needy students missing bursary funds. It would therefore enable more students to enroll and complete secondary education. This would subsequently enable the government to achieve its aim of Education For All (EFA) by 2015.

Keywords: access, bursary, public subsidy, needy students, disbursement of bursaries, drop out, retention, efficient, quality education. leaders.

INTRODUCTION

Education can be regarded as governments' investments as well as private and social investments since governments subsidize education and, in return, derive higher tax revenues from the educated (Psacharopoulos & Woodhall, 1985). The provision of education and training to all Kenyans is fundamental to the success of the government's overall development strategy. The long-term objective of the government is to provide every Kenyan with basic quality education and training. This includes 2 years of pre-primary, 8 years of primary and 4 years of secondary education. It also entails investing in human capital which is a key determinant of economic growth. Indeed, sustainable development can be achieved if there is an adequate quantity of skilled human resources. It is through education that the wealth of the country can be distributed equally among the citizens of the country.

Education also aims to enhance the ability of Kenyans to preserve and utilize the environment for productive gain and sustainable livelihoods. The realization of universal access to basic education and training ensures equitable access to the education and training for all children, including disadvantaged and vulnerable groups. Education is necessary for the development and protection of democratic institutions human rights and is an important factor in poverty reduction (GoK, 2005).

The provision of education and training to all Kenyans is significant because of its essential role in development of the country. According to GoK (2005), education is necessary for the development and protection of democratic institutions and human rights. Studies on poverty in Kenya indicate that education is an important factor in poverty reduction as well. The government has therefore given priority to education in the national budget due to the benefits accrued from it. In addition, education is a path to escape from poverty and welfare dependency (Muthwii, 2004; Ndiku, 2007). It is through education that poverty can be eradicated.

The cost of provision of education has risen in developing countries as a result of rising enrolment due to increased social demand for education and high expenditure on teachers' salaries. As a result, developing countries have experienced a high increase in their expenditure on education than in the growth of their national economics. The government has continued to subsidize the cost of education in Kenya due to its effort to attain the objectives of education for all (EFA) and the Millennium Development Goals (MDG) (MoE, 2008).

The government allocates more money to the Ministry of Education than other ministries in its national budget and a high percentage of this money is meant for teachers' salaries. For example, secondary education received 21.4 percent of public

education financing in 2004/05 of which 93.5 percent went to salaries. Developing countries have therefore experienced a high increase in their expenditures on education than in the growth of their national economies. Most of the African countries' economic growth was slowed by the type of political leadership's fund dispensation which failed to create conducive environment for economic growth

Secondary education was crucial in that it was after secondary school education that one could join the labour force. According to Nafula (2001), the aim of secondary education was to create a human resource base for the country at a level higher than primary education. According to Lewin (2003), access to and successful completion of secondary education shapes the skills of the labour force. It is at secondary level that one can be able to participate in development of the nation using the knowledge acquired at school.

There are various methods of financing education in our country, including: secondary school Education Bursary fund (SEBF), Free Tuition for secondary schools, foreign aid, Non-Governmental Organizations, Constituency Development Fund (CDF) and individuals. The area of concern in this study was the bursary funds. This is specifically meant for the bright and needy students in the secondary level of education. Bursary funds are widely used schemes of financing education in other countries as well.

The government has continued to subsidize the cost of education, working towards realization of the objective of attaining the goals of Education for All (EFA) and the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) by 2015. In an effort to attain these objectives, the government has made primary education accessible to all by introducing Free Primary Education (FPE) in 2003. It has also introduced free day-school secondary education with a view of making it accessible to all though these undertakings in primary and secondary education have their challenges. Alongside the government grants, was the introduction of bursary for secondary education meant for needy students. The secondary Bursary Fund was introduced in 1993 to enable needy student's access and complete secondary education. The secondary school education bursary fund (SEBF) was established in 1993/4, through a presidential pronouncement, to cushion the country's poor and vulnerable groups against the high and increasing cost of secondary education, therefore reducing inequalities. It was also aimed at increasing enrolment in secondary school. It aimed at achieving high transition rate from primary school to secondary school. The fund targets orphans and girl children as well as those from poor households and urban slums, who are able to achieve good results in examination (<http://www.kippra.org/secondary,esp>)

According to Gachukia (2007), disbursement of funds was initially directed to schools. The head teachers of secondary schools were given the responsibility of disbursement of the funds to the needy and bright students. The official criteria for the allocation of funds at that time included a 5% reservation of the total allocation for national schools 10% for monitoring and evaluation (M &E), pockets of poverty, HIV/AIDS and orphans and other vulnerable children and 25% to all (non-national) secondary schools. According to Gachukia (2007), there are various government agencies and non-state providers of bursaries and scholarships to secondary school students. These include United Nations' Children Education Fund (UNICEF), the Jomo Kenyatta Foundation (JKF), Educational Trust, private companies, individuals and International NGOs.

Since the introduction of free tuition for secondary schools in 2008, the bursary allocation from the Ministry of Education has been scaled down from about Ksh. 800 million to Ksh. 500 million (Daily Nation, May 5th 2009). The Ministry of Education released Ksh. 500 million for bursary for secondary schools in May 2009. Under the existing allocation procedures, the funds were to be disbursed to constituency bursary committees formed by sitting Member of Parliament. Each of the 210 constituencies was allocated Ksh. 1 million, with the rest being disbursed based on enrollment. Consideration is also given to the constituency's level of poverty (ibid).

According to Psacharopoulos and Woodhall (1985), the political power of the middle and upper class group and elites and their determination to retain economic and educational privileges are motivating factors in the provision of education. Indeed many of the suggestions of improving equality of educational investment are usurped by elites for their personal gain. It is imperative that politicians are controlled so as to ensure that they do not exploit the ordinary people in the education sector. There should be separation between politics and issues of national importance like bursaries. The fund is for the benefit of the community and politicians should not manipulate for gaining political support.

Mugambi (2002) observed that those concerned with awarding bursaries use their positions to assist their undeserving relatives acquire the awards. This result in needy and deserving not getting the bursary, moreover claims have been advanced on members of parliament that they influence on the composition of the committees by nominating their supporters. This is why most of the leaders associate themselves with the bursary scheme. Bursary should not be used for personal aggrandizement and selfish ends and perhaps this is what Stasavage (2005) had in mind

when he argues that rapid expansion in access to primary education in recent years in Kenya as in Uganda and Tanzania are linked to the (re-)introduction of democratic election in these countries, his point being that when leaders are subjected to competitive politics they tend to initiate policies that are popular with the electorate. This is purposely for outdoing one another in terms of gaining political popularity hence attracting more supporters.

Following the changes in the allocation mechanisms since 2003, claims of misallocation of bursary funds, double awards to one student in two schools, awards to “ghost” students, as well as excessive patronage by members of parliament who influenced skewed allocations have been prevalent (Siringi, 2006). This interference of allocation of bursary by politicians was made possible by the fact that they became patrons of the constituency bursary schemes. Most of the members of parliament use the bursary funds in his/her constituency to gain some political mileage in the community. Other stakeholders are involved in the interference of the allocation of bursaries in schools. This includes the provincial administration (chiefs and assistant chiefs are known to have some influence), religious leaders and the District Education officials.

IPAR (2003) reported that, in some cases, DEOs and politicians are said to have put undue pressure on head teachers to allocate bursaries to their relatives, thereby denying the genuinely needy students access to the facility. This implies that students who did not deserve to receive bursary funds at the expense of needy students. This leads to needy students not accessing the bursary hence risk dropping out.

According to a report by Soy (The Standard, August 15th 2007), many parents in Machakos and Kangundo districts are also dissatisfied with their CBF committees. They accuse politicians of awarding the fund to their cronies. In one constituency son of a member of parliament (MP) pursuing a parallel degree at the University of Nairobi was one of the beneficiaries. The report adds that, in some constituencies, MPs must approve beneficiaries and amounts awarded. She further reported that a catholic priest says that CBF is a noble idea that has been abused by politicians, adding that, unless the bursary kitty is streamlined, poor students will not access secondary education. These arguments points at the political interference on the awarding of bursaries in secondary schools to the needy students. The intended purpose for bursary might not be achieved hence many needy students will not access the facility. A government survey in 2009 found that politicians meddled in the award of bursaries by recommending the beneficiaries and that this is

hurting the poor and delaying school cash (Siringi, 2009). This study mainly focused on politicians.

This study encountered several setbacks: the bursary committees at the constituency level and location did not respond freely to the questions: some of the bursary distribution forms and documents were unavailable and some headteachers saw this study as interference while some of the bursary committees had semi-literate members.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study followed a descriptive survey research design. The descriptive survey research design is a method of collecting information by interviewing or administering a questionnaire to a sample of individuals. It is used to investigate populations by selecting samples to analyze and discover occurrences. The design enabled the researcher to collect data from the selected sample within a short time. It was also not costly and the researcher managed to collect information from a larger sample. This study assumed both a quantitative and qualitative nature.

Target population

The target population of the study consisted of all Form Four needy students and 10 headteachers of all public boarding schools in Wareng district. 15 Constituency Bursary Committee members and 210 Locational Bursary Committee members in 14 locations in Wareng district were also selected. This target population was chosen due to the fact that form four students are beneficiaries of bursary funds and they are more aware of the challenges which affect the bursary allocation. The principals manage the schools and, therefore, they know the beneficiaries of the bursary funds in schools and problems which affect bursary distribution. The CBC is responsible for the allocation of bursary funds to the LBC who in turn are entrusted with the obligation of distributing bursary funds to needy students.

Sample Size and Sampling Procedure

All the public boarding secondary schools in Wareng district (10) were selected for this study using purposive sampling technique. In the same schools, all the needy, form four students (200), identified by their head teachers, participated in this study. Ten head teachers were purposively selected for this study. The form four needy students were used because of their vast experience on the bursary disbursement. The head teachers of the same schools were selected for this study because of their managerial positions in their schools and the fact that they are able to provide information on bursary beneficiaries and those who deserve to be given bursary funds and challenges they face. Purposive sampling technique was used to select the constituency bursary committee members where the

chairman and the secretary were selected for this study. They were selected purposively due to the fact that the constituency bursary committee delegates the task of bursary distribution to the LBC. They were used to provide information about the process of delegating the bursary to LBCs and because of their executive positions in the committee. There were 15 members in this committee. There are 14 locations in Wareng district and each location was mandated to disburse bursary funds to the deserving students. The researcher took 30% of the 14 locations for this study. The simple random sampling technique was used to select 4 locations used for this study. There were 15 members in each LBC and some of them were semi-illiterate, a fact which necessitated the use of interview schedules for data collection. The chairman and the secretary of each of the 4 locations were selected for this study using purposive sampling technique because of their positions in the committee and the fact that it was not possible to interview each member of the LBCs.

Table 1: The sample size

Sample	
Name	Number
Students	200
headteachers	10
Locational committee	8
Constituency committee	2
Total Number	220

Research Instruments

The researcher used questionnaires and interviews as tools for collecting data. A questionnaire consists of a number of questions printed or typed in definite order on a form or set of forms. This tool enabled the researcher to obtain information directly from the respondents. This tool was selected due to the nature of data to be collected, the time available as well as the objectives of the study. The advantages of questionnaires include the fact that it can cover a wide area and without bias from neither the researcher nor the respondents. Interview method of collecting data involves presentation of oral-verbal stimuli and reply in terms of oral-verbal responses. This tool enabled the researcher to obtain information directly from the respondents. The structured interview was used to obtain information. The questionnaires were administered to students and the headteachers in boarding secondary schools. Interviews were used to collect data from the CBC and LBC members.

Data Collection Procedure

Data was collected after the pretest and determining the validity and reliability of the research instruments. The head teachers were requested to identify the needy students by providing the list of students who have fees arrears, who are bursary beneficiaries and those who get financial assistance from other sources and are needy. All the 200

students identified in form four were used for this study. This was done before the day of administering the questionnaires. The questionnaires were given to the principals of schools and gave to identified needy students at their own free time to complete at their convenience. The questionnaires were used to collect quantitative data from the respondents. The researcher collected the filled questionnaires one week after submission. The structured interview was used to collect qualitative data from the bursary committees. Two members of the constituency bursary committee were interviewed by the researcher using the structured interview. Two members of the LBCs in 4 locations were interviewed and their responses recorded. The questionnaires and interviews were administered on different days depending on the convenience of the schools and bursary committees.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

This paper sought to investigate the role of political leaders in influencing the award of bursary funds. To achieve this objective, the needy students and Locational Bursary Committee members who participated in this study revealed that 55% of the students agreed that they have been assisted by political leader or prominent person while 45% disagreed. The LBC members interviewed stated that their appointment was influenced by area member of parliament whereas others were appointed by the community. The majority of the committee members also stated that they were assisted by politicians to be in the committee. The constituency bursary committee interviewed reported that they were appointed by the sitting Member of Parliament and are to serve for five years just the same term with the Member of Parliament.

DISCUSSION

The study revealed that 55% of the students agreed that they have been assisted by political leaders or prominent persons. The students also reported that the chiefs, councilors, church leaders and the area's Member of Parliament interfered with bursary disbursement. All these factors indicate that the deserving and/or needy student does not access bursary funds due to the interference by the leaders. This therefore means that political leaders or other prominent persons influence the awarding of the bursary funds to the needy. It indicates that undeserving students are given bursary funds and this leads to the needy not accessing the funds. When the students were asked to give examples on such leaders, they reported that the chiefs, councilors, church leaders and area member of parliament. This concurs with the government's survey (2009) which found that politicians meddled in the award of bursaries by recommending the beneficiaries, and that politicians are hurting the poor and delaying school cash (Siringi, 2009).

It therefore implies that they will serve their boss or Member of Parliament more than the needy students. A report by Soy (2007) indicated that many parents in Machakos and Kang'undo districts are also dissatisfied with their constituency Bursary Committees. They accuse politicians of awarding the funds to their cronies. This reveals that the bursary committees are easily influenced by politicians. The LBC members interviewed reported that there were prominent people who influenced bursary distribution in the area of study. They reported that constituency committee members awarded bursaries to their relatives and friends by replacing some of the names of those identified at locational level. They also stated that there was no transparency as to how much in total was received from the Ministry of Education. Further they revealed that politicians for example councilors and Member of Parliament interfere with the bursary awards and that religious leaders also fight for their church members to be represented in the bursary committee. This means that the leaders influence the bursary allocation to the students and the deserving students are therefore denied the right of getting bursary. This relates to the argument by Mugambi (2002) who observed that those concerned with awarding bursaries use their positions to assist their undeserving relatives acquire the awards. The objective in this section was achieved due to the factors discussed above with a view of providing answers to the stated objective.

Needy students reported that they were assisted by political leaders to get bursary funds according to 55% of those who agreed. The remaining 45% reported that they were not assisted by political leaders. This implies that political leaders do influence the distribution of bursary using their powers by deciding who to assist regardless of the stipulated procedures. Moreover, the locational bursary committee members interviewed revealed that politicians for instance councilors, church leaders, chiefs and Member of Parliament interfere with the bursary awards in the area of study. They also suggested those to be appointed to the bursary committee. It shows that the bursary committee members appointed by the political leaders are liable for manipulation by the same leaders. They further reported that the area Member of Parliament cause the delay for disbursement of bursary funds. This report concurs with the report by government survey in 2009 that found that politicians meddled in the award of bursaries by recommending the beneficiaries, and that politicians were hurting the poor and delaying school cash (Siringi, 2009). The bursary committee added that the religious leaders also fight for their church members to be represented. This shows some interest which the church has on the same funds. The locational bursary committee members who participated in this study reported that constituency committee members awarded bursaries

to their relatives and friends by replacing some of the names of those identified at locational level. They also stated that there was no transparency as to how much in total was received from the ministry of Education. Similarly, at constituency level, the beneficiaries are not made known to the public by displaying their names at strategic public places. It therefore gives advantage to the bursary committees to give the bursaries to their friends. In such a scenario the needy students will not get bursary funds.

CONCLUSION

It can be concluded that the majority of the students were assisted by political leaders to get bursary funds, indicating that those who deserve to are not considered for the funds. Moreover, the Locational Bursary Committee members interviewed stated that they were appointed to the bursary committee through the influence of political leaders. This implies that, as members of the committee, they will serve according to the whims of these political leader.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- ❖ The award of bursaries to needy students should be open and fair in order to ensure that needy students get the right amount of money in terms of bursary. Therefore the Government should put in place monitoring mechanisms to detect cases of corruption and nepotism in the awarding of the bursaries.
- ❖ The awarding of bursary should only be directed to needy students. The amount of money awarded to a needy student should be substantial, to enable the student to clear fee balances and remain in class to continue learning. This will add more meaning to the awarding of the bursary instead of giving a student what can not make him remain in school to learn.

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