

An investigation into the management and implementation of No Fee school policy on the access of education in Limpopo Province, Vhembe District: A Case Study of Mudaswali Circuit

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ABSTRACT

South Africa began with the 'no-fee' school policy (NFSP) implementation since 01 January 2007. The policy abolished mandatory school fees in public and private schools to make basic education available to poor learners in the country. However, critics argued that the NFSP implementation made poor schools and needed research. This prompted an exploration on "No-fee schools' inability to address the needs of the poor in Limpopo" The study focuses on the extent to which the "no fee" policy affects the financial management and support for educational programmes at "no fee" secondary schools in Vhembe district, Limpopo Province.

The "no fee" policy derives from the Education Laws Amendment Act (Act No. 24 of 2005) according to which the levying of mandatory fees has been abolished at public schools that are declared "no fee" institutions. The State has subsequently assumed the role of funding these "no fee" schools in order to create greater access to education and to improve the supply of educational resources as well as equipment in the impoverished schools.

The study uses both quantitative and qualitative techniques for data collection and analysis. Qualitative techniques were mostly used in that they provide the researcher with an understanding of experiences and problems that faced school managers with regard to the implementation and management of no fee school policy in Mudaswali circuit, Limpopo Province. Random and purposive samplings were used for the selection of sample for the study. Both primary and secondary data was used for analysis in this study. Secondary data were obtained from government publications, research publications, and reports. Primary data was obtained through personal observation, and household's questionnaires. Data was collected through semi-structured interviews and documentation. Interviewees were principals, treasurers and chairpersons of school governing

bodies from the schools selected for investigation. The collected data was analysed through inductive techniques.

The study discovered that the no-fee schools were unable to address the needs of the poor in Limpopo. The findings of the research study eventually led to the recommendations that are presented as guidelines for the SGBs, principals as well as education authorities on the management of “no fee” schools.

The research contained the following as findings:

- The majority of respondent disagreed that the funds allocated to school do meet the school needs. This notion was strongly supported by 25 respondent constituting 50% of the total sample and that could have been caused by prices which were increasing daily
- The findings indicate 32 respondents constituting 63% of the total sample disagreed that schools stuck to the prescribed budget when expending funds something which could have been caused by lack of training of finance committee on financial management.
- The finding shows that 32 respondent constituting 64% of the total sample disagreed that the resources provided by the no fee policy could cater for all the needs of the schools.
- The notion demonstrated 12 respondent constituting 23% of the total sample to disagree that the no fee policy was the only way to assist the poor financially could be based on misconception of the problems and challenges facing the poor in the society by a certain section of the community members.

- The findings indicate 33 respondents who constituted 65% of the total sample disagreed that the no fee policy assist planning in advance, and this could be the fact that planning was only done on papers as funds do not reach schools on the expected time.

The following were recommendations which were made to the No fee School Policy:

- The study recommended that the DoE develop and establish coping strategies aimed at offsetting, addressing or eliminating the challenges related to the NFSP implementation. The coping strategies should include broad capacity building, monitoring, and stakeholder involvement.
- All SGBs of no fee schools should be adequately trained in order to ensure that they are empowered with relevant skills, especially in the writing of appropriate financial policies that will clarify the financial roles and responsibilities and to eliminate risks that could lead to financial mismanagement.
- The education department should assist all no fee schools to establish functional financial committees that will manage school finances on the day-to-day basis in conjunction with the principals.
- Schools budgets should be submitted to the education authorities in time in order to ensure that paper-budgets relate to and address the identified needs of the schools.