



Perceptions of Teachers towards the Cost Sharing Policy in Mashonaland West Province in Zimbabwe

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Abstract: *Cost sharing in education refers to a shift in the burden of education costs from being borne exclusively or predominately by government, or taxpayers, to being shared with parents and students. This cost sharing, may take the form of tuition, either being introduced where it did not hitherto exist or being rapidly increased where it already did, or of public institutions charging more nearly break-even, or full, cost fees for room, board, books, and other costs of student living that may formerly have been covered mainly by the government. A shift of the cost burden from the government to student and family may also come in the form of a reduction or even a freezing (especially in inflationary times) of student grants. Similarly, it may come in the form of a reduction of the effective grants represented by student loan subsidies.*

Keywords: *Perceptions, teachers, cost sharing, policy, province*

1. INTRODUCTION

The cost sharing policy of the colonial period was designed in such a way that the minority whites got the bigger share of the central government budget. Due to racial segregation practices in the education system of the day, education of the majority blacks was treated as inferior hence deserving less funding from the national budget with private stakeholders like churches, farmers, local communities and parents being obligated with the responsibility of financing native education. Marcucci et al. (2008:27) say, "The inferiority of African education was not limited to underfunding, curricula, and pedagogy alone, but it was also affected in the poor quality of the administrative and organizational structures and practices." The black administration reformed the colonial cost sharing policy at independence making it more affirmative in nature as it tried to address the disparities of the past education system. Free and compulsory education under the Universal Primary Education policy (Zimbabwe News Vol 16 No1, 1995) and the creation of an uninhibited access to secondary education resulted in massive student enrolments at most secondary schools against limited and ever dwindling national financial resources. Resources to cushion these high enrolment figures at secondary level were very scarce as evidenced by the high student per textbook and students per teacher ratios as well as the unavailability of adequate classrooms even for primary schools which had been exempted from paying fees. Nhundu and Makoni (2009) further argue that the failure by government to provide building grants at primary level meant that parents remained with the burden of providing both locally accessed building materials and building levies that were needed to meet the infrastructural needs of the boosting enrolments. Even at secondary school level where building grants were being given, they were not enough to cover the huge costs of such building projects resulting in parents partnering the government in funding these developments. What it therefore means is that parents were and are still partnering the government in the provision of education and the problem remains on whether they are coping with this obligation under this current severe economic environment.

The burden extended to poor parents with regard partnering government in providing education to its citizens came into light in the 1980s when a public finance crisis impacted heavily on developing nations including Zimbabwe. Governments were then compelled by these circumstances to introduce pronounced cost sharing policies. As is given Morse (2015:10), this cost sharing policy was an, '...attempt by governments to have recipients bear more of the cost burden of providing public services.' The Zimbabwean situation was made even more pathetic when the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund advised the government to introduce the Economic Structural Adjustment Programme as a cost recovery measure by reducing expenditure on non-profit making arms of government. This new policy created a host of economic problems to parents as private

investors in education since most of them had been retrenched. These impoverished parents and guardians found it difficult to raise funds for fees and levies. The awarded retrenchment packages fell far below the demands of the instituted cost sharing policy in education and it was to such an extent that these problems affected the provision of quality and equitable education as alluded to by this study.

The hyper-inflationary environment that came as a result of targeted sanctions on the then government of Zimbabwe by Western nations also impacted negatively on the cost sharing policy as the impoverished parents' meagre earnings and reserves were eroded. Indicators of this negative impact were high attrition rates, low retention rates as well as low 'O' and 'A' Level pass rates as found out by this study.

It is government policy in Zimbabwe communicated through the Administrative and Finance Circular Minute No: 6 of 1994 that every school must have either a School Development Association (SDA) or School Development Committee (SDC) mandated to gazette and collect fees and levies from the parents for development purposes of schools they represent. The Ministry of Education, Sports, Arts and Culture however has the sole responsibility of approving these fees and levies applications before they are enforced; a development which also has a myriad of administrative problems impacting negatively on the provision of quality education especially for schools in poor communities. The introduction of some mitigatory measures by the government such as payment of fees for the disadvantaged children through the Social Dimension Fund now referred to as the Basic Education Assistance Module, government scholarships at 'O' and 'A' levels as well as building and textbook grants, has resulted in mushrooming of problems to the cost sharing policy in secondary schools. Major problems were being faced in the implementation process where even undeserving students benefit due to corrupt practices by set selection committees.

2. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Primary and secondary education are the two basic levels of education expected to enhance the individual's capacity to contribute positively to society. These two levels should therefore, lay a foundation on which the learner develops cognitively, socially, and educationally. Despite the rising costs in education and increasing demand of primary and secondary education due to rising social awareness in education and the reported parents' inability to incur the rising costs to sustain educational demand, government has introduced the policy of cost-sharing.

The study was guided by the following objectives:

1. To assess the roles of the various stakeholders in cost sharing in public primary and secondary schools in Zimbabwe.
2. To examine the policy of cost sharing in the context of Zimbabwean primary and secondary education.
3. To find out the impact of the cost sharing policy on the quality of education in public primary and secondary education.
5. To suggest strategies that promote high quality educational standards in the context of cost sharing.

2.1. Sub-questions

The study will attempt to answer the following sub-questions.

1. How are the stakeholders involved in the cost sharing in public primary and secondary education in Zimbabwe?
2. What does the policy of cost sharing in Zimbabwean primary and secondary schools entail?
3. To what extent is the policy of cost sharing affecting the quality of primary and secondary education?
4. How can the Government, community and parents ensure that the quality of education is not compromised by cost sharing.

Assumptions

In this study it assumed that:

- The cost sharing policy is implemented in all public primary and secondary schools in Zimbabwe.
- The Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education will see the importance of the study and thus allow the researcher entry into their schools.
- The respondents and participants will accept to participate in the study and thus cooperate by providing relevant information.

2.2. Delimitation of the Study

The study is mainly focused on the policy of cost sharing in the provision of public primary and secondary education and will confine itself to Mashonaland West Province of Zimbabwe. In terms of methodological boundaries, the study adopted the mixed methods approach and use the triangulation research design. Both probability and non-probability sampling were used. To select respondents for the quantitative data, simple random sampling will be used and for the qualitative data, maximum variation/heterogeneous purposive sampling was employed. Regarding literature review demarcations, the study was confined to the main concept of cost sharing in the provision of public primary and secondary education and its sub-concept of impact of cost sharing on quality of education. The theories that guided the study are the classical and liberal theories. The study's data collection and generation instruments/methods were the questionnaires, semi-structured interviews, document analysis and observations.

2.3. Limitations of the Study

The participants might fear victimization by participating in the study and then give limited answers to questions. The researcher assured participants of confidentiality and that their responses are for educational purposes only. It would have been ideal to conduct a study of this magnitude to cover all the provinces in Zimbabwe, but due to time constraints and financial constraints this was difficult. Thus, the study's findings might not easily be generalisable to all the provinces. This limitation was mitigated by purposively sampling schools that reflect the general trends across all the provinces in the country. The mixed methodology which the study adopted was time consuming and expensive because the researcher has to learn multiple methods and be able to know how to mix each method effectively. The researcher got solace from using the strengths of the two to mitigate their weaknesses. The other challenge of mixed methods research concerns the limitations of quantified qualitative data for statistical measurement. As Roberts (2020) argues, these data are vulnerable to the problem of collinearity, wherein response categories are themselves linked to a consequence of the coding strategy. The researcher mitigated these limitations by employing simple statistical measures of association only for response categories collected in different phases and with different questions.

3. RESULTS

3.1. Conceptualisation of the Cost-sharing Policy

The first question wanted to find out from the teacher respondents whether they were aware of the meaning of the cost sharing policy. Their responses are captured under Figure 4.1 that below.

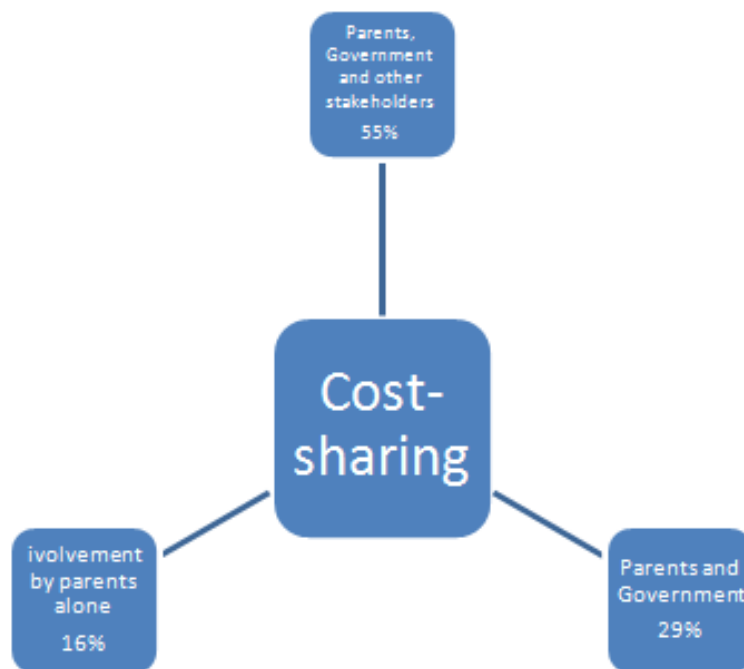


Figure1. Cost-sharing definition (N=33)

The data in Figure 4.1 reveals that on the whole, there is some basic understanding of the concept of cost-sharing by teachers. The overwhelming number of the teacher respondents (55% stated that cost sharing policy meant the involvement of the government, parents and other stakeholders in the provision of financial resources for the education of school children in the country. Those who thought it meant the involvement of parents and the government in contributing towards the financing of education of learners were twenty-nine (29%) percent of the teacher respondents. The remaining fifteen (15%) percent argued that as far as they were concerned, cost-sharing meant that parents remained the only people responsible for paying fees and levies of their children. Although there are variances in the conceptualization of the phenomenon of cost-sharing; what is apparent that all the categories of responses indicate some kind of involvement in the contribution towards financing education by other stakeholders other than the government which is the traditional recourse provider of resources in the schools. This conceptualization tallies with observations by Morse (2015) who posits that, cost sharing in education refers to a shift in the burden of education costs from being borne exclusively or predominately by government, or taxpayers, to being shared with parents and students.

4. POLICIES INHIBITING QUALITY EDUCATION

The next section presents the perceptions of teachers towards the removal of the policy of incentives. The policy of incentives was introduced to motivate teachers by giving them some extra dollars on top of their meagre salaries. However, the policy had its own controversies amongst which was the fact that it stated that School Development Committees from each school had to pay ten percent from the collected revenue to teachers. Schools had varying capacities of collecting revenue due to a number of factors. Some schools were located in relatively low income communities and could not raise any meaningful revenue for their teachers whilst those from affluent schools were receiving handsome incentives. This then brought about a lot of disgruntlement especially from those who were not receiving reasonable amounts. Instead of motivating teachers the policy demotivated a large section of the teacher population. This forced the government to abandon the policy. The researcher therefore wanted to find out to what extent this move affected the teachers themselves.

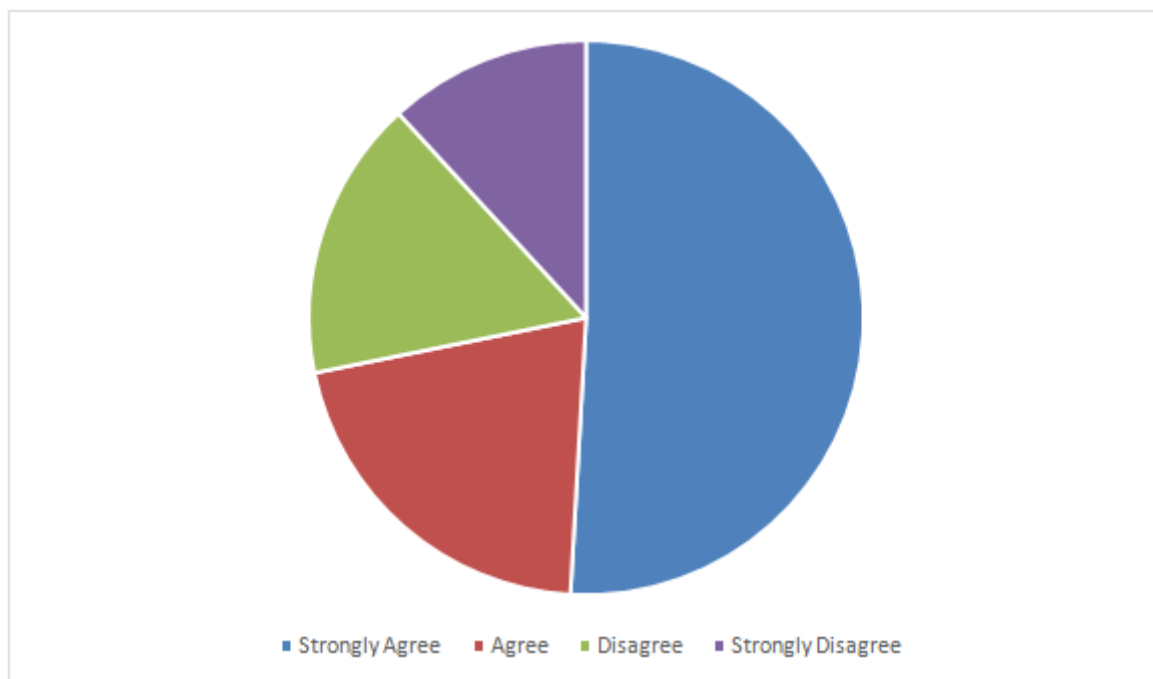


Figure2. Removal of incentives was a big mistake (N=33)

The information on Figure 4. 2 depicts that the vast majority of the teacher respondents do concur with the assertion that the government made a monumental error by withdrawing the policy on teacher incentives. Those who disagreed were few but nonetheless existed. Those who were for the policy argued that it motivated teachers to perform better with less stress and frustration and thus concentrated more on their task of helping learners for the improvement of the learners’ performance. Thus, they further argued, this promoted the quality of education in the schools. However, those who were happy about the scrapping of the policy cited discrepancies in the payment of the incentives and that their schools were totally failing to raise the funds and that during the existence of the policy they spent most of their time thinking about living their schools. However, on the whole, the policy was a good one in the eyes of the teachers.

The next section looks at the other policies that were cited by the teacher respondents as inhibiting the provision of quality education. The Table below clearly depicts the information.

Table1. Policies that inhibit provision of quality education (N=33)

Category of responses	Frequency	Percentage
Teacher/Pupil ratio	12	36
Deployment policy	7	22
Transfer policy	8	24
Lack of collective bargaining	4	12
Sending learners back home for fees	2	6
Totals	33	100

From the above information, it is quite apparent that there are a number of policies that are not seen in good light by the teacher respondents in terms of these policies affecting the provision of quality education. A large number of the (teachers thirty-six percent, 36%) mentioned the policy that governs the number of learners each teacher should handle both at primary and secondary school level. The official teacher-pupil ratio at primary school level is forty learners for every teacher and at secondary level it ranges from twenty-five for A level classes, to thirty –five for the lower forms. However, in real terms it is not uncommon to have a class with sixty learners being handled by one teacher. This creates challenges for teachers as they cannot provide adequate individual attention to every learner. The transfer policy was also cited as another inhibiting policy to quality education. The policy states that a teacher deployed at a particular school should stay for a certain period before they can leave their school. However, what happens is that even after the expiry of the stipulated time, the teacher may not be released to a school of his/her choice due to a number of reasons. For example, they might

be told that there are no vacancies in the district or province they want to transfer to. This then results in a situation where the teacher is frustrated and cannot perform to his/her optimum due to this. Deployment policy was also viewed as not good for quality education. They indicated that newly qualified teachers were deployed in areas they were not interested to work in as they not given any option to work where they wanted to. This also led to a lot of challenges that compromised quality of education. Lack of collective bargaining was cited as another inhibiting policy. Teacher trade unions had no legal capacity to force government to pay them salaries commensurate with their qualifications and statuses but merely accepted what the government offered them. This led to mass exodus of teachers to other countries and those who remained spent most of their time doing other things with minimum concentration on teaching. Finally, the policy of not sending learners who have not paid school levies back home to look for the money was also viewed as being negative . The respondents argued that because of this policy, some parents were not taking payment of their children’s fees seriously as thy would hide behind this policy. As a result, most school administrations were struggling to raise money for running their schools.

The next section presents data related to the capacities of stakeholders regarding their capacities to sustain the cost-sharing policy through actions and not rhetoric.

5. CAPACITIES OF VARIOUS STAKEHOLDERS

As already alluded to in the preceding section, this section deals with the perceptions of the teacher respondents regarding the capacities of the various stakeholders in terms of providing the needed resources for the full implementation of the cost-sharing policy. Table 4.5. depicts the statistical information obtained from the respondents.

Table2. *Capacities of various stakeholders (N=33)*

Variables	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Standard Deviation
Education sponsors are making appropriate measures to ensure that quality and equitable education is realised.	33	1.00	4.00	1.9375	.80071
Organisations sponsor some of the learners	33	2.00	5.00	3.6364	1.45384
Teachers are living comfortably at my school	33	1.00	5.00	3.8485	1.43878

The data on whether various stakeholders have capacities needed to sustain the cost-sharing policy reveals that to some limited extent, teachers felt that stake holders could sustain the policy. The perceptions of the respondents as reflected by the responses based on the means reveal that the respondents disagreed with the assertion that education sponsors were making appropriate measures to ensure that quality and equitable education is realised. From this finding it can be inferred that the teachers do not see sponsors coming in to support the education system as the policy of cost- sharing had envisaged. This is why the mean is 1.9375, which demonstrates the level of dissatisfaction regarding this phenomenon. Surprisingly though, respondents stated that there were some organisations that sponsored some learners contradicting their perception that the sponsors were not making appropriate measures to ensure that quality and equitable education is realised. The mean on this item is 3.6364 and the standard deviation 1.45384. On further interrogation of the respondents on this item, they stated that much as there were organisations that were supporting individual learners, this did not amount to a comprehensive school support programme which would inevitable promote quality education. On whether they were living comfortably in their schools, the respondents also agreed that they were indeed very comfortable in their schools giving a mean of 3.8485. The significance of this data is that it reveals that the schools were trying their level best to keep their teachers relatively happy in the midst of various challenges surrounding their work places. In some schools, for example they revealed that they were given prime land by the local authorities where they were engaging in farming activities to augment their salaries.

The next section presents data on the indicators that respondents pointed to challenges of the cost-sharing policy. This information is depicted in Table 4.6 that follows.

Table3. Indicators pointing to challenges of the cost sharing-policy (N=33)

Variables	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Standard Deviation
The retention rate of teachers is very low	33	1.00	4.00	3.5152	1.22783
Many students drop out of school due to failure to pay school fees	33	2.00	5.00	2.9697	1.26206
My school ensures that all students have access to education	33	1.00	5.00	2.3939	1.36792
My school assists vulnerable students	33	1.00	5.00	3.7273	1.46357
My school is connected to internet	33	1.00	4.00	1.7576	1.14647
There are challenges stifling teachers to realise set goals	33	1.00	4.00	3.3636	.74239
Most teachers at my school would prefer to join private schools	33	1.00	4.00	3.0000	.96825
The school sends children home for fees	33	1.00	5.00	3.7576	1.32359
Students sent home take time to return	33	1.00	5.00	2.0909	1.58831
The school does not make up for lost time	33	2.00	5.00	3.6061	1.41287
Students lack basic commodities	33	1.00	5.00	3.3636	1.57754

The data on Table 4.6 reveal that there are quite a number of indicators that point to the fact the policy of cost-sharing is experiencing challenges. The cost-sharing policy resulted in the introduction of high levies that are paid by parents of learners. This has resulted in a number of learners failing to pay these fees and thus subjected to periods of being sent home to look for the fees. As the data show, the majority of teacher respondents admitted that quite a significant number of learners who could not pay their fees were sent home and for others, they ended up failing completely to return to the schools. Thus, the failure to pay fees caused high dropouts rates among the learners. The mean of 2.9697 reveals that the respondents were in agreement that the cost-sharing policy is responsible for high drop-out rates. The information also reveals that the respondents stated that their schools did not have internet connectivity due to lack of financial resources. As can be seen from the statistical mean and standard deviation, a number of the respondents highlighted that their schools were not connected to internet (Mean=1.7575: Standard deviation: 1.14647 respectively). On whether learners sent home to look for fees took time to return, the respondents were of the opinion that, most of those who were sent back home to fetch fees quickly returned to school to attend to lessons. The mean on this item is 2.0909. It has to be stated that although the majority of the learners sent home for fees return in relatively short space of time, this nonetheless affects their learning as teachers do not freeze teaching waiting for those who were sent home. The item on whether the school created time to compensate learning time for those who were sent home for fees shows that there was no room for that. Teachers continued with their syllabi coverage as if nothing had happened and in the process disadvantaging a lot of learners. This is confirmed by the mean and standard deviation of 3.6061 and 1.41287 respectively. The respondents also highlighted the fact that the cost-sharing policy affected the capacity of parents to provide other basic necessities to their children like proper uniform, food and exercise books as most of the money they raised had to go to the fees. This is reflected by the mean and standard deviations on this item (3.3636 and 1.57754) respectively. The vast majority of the respondents stated that given the option, they would opt to teach in a private school, than in a public school. The main motive for this (according to the teachers) being their perception of the private school as a greener pasture in terms of good working conditions and quality of learning and teaching. The respondents also highlighted that they were experiencing a myriad of challenges that stifled their endeavours to implement set goals and objectives. The mean for this item stood at 3.3636.

6. CONCLUSIONS

From the information above, it is evident that teachers have a full comprehension of what cost sharing involves. Cost sharing is viewed as the participation of various stakeholders in partnership with the government in the provision of education as opposed to having the government taking charge of everything. The study also reveals that there are many policies that have impacted either negatively or positively on the quality of education. The policy that bars schools from sending learners who have not paid fees home was seen as a very retrogressive policy as it made it difficult for the schools to collect levies from the parents. The results also reveal that a majority of the stakeholders had no capacities to contribute towards the education of children. This situation negated the policy of cost sharing which was supposed to be anchored on the capacities of the stakeholders to contribute significantly towards the education system. The participants also highlighted some of the indicators that confirmed the challenges that stakeholders were experiencing.

7. RECOMMENDATIONS

- Government must increase funding and resuscitate funding directly to schools. Per capita grants helped individual schools directly in purchasing textbooks, stationery and sporting equipment. Government must provide new vehicles since the current ones have exceeded five years and are now a liability hampering effective supervision of the education system. Government must continue to encourage and empower schools with resources to introduce income generation
- The government must timely review the grants it is extending to school and to beat the hyper-inflationary economic environment and make sure that there is consistence in the disbursement process.
- For effective funding of all educational programmes in Zimbabwe, there is a great need for all players to put politics aside and come up with strategies that objectively contribute towards the support of education. Every player must play his/her part timely and adequately so that the intended beneficiary, the learner, gets basic education that happen to be his/her human right.

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