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Assessing the role of the Ministry of Basic and Senior Secondary School Education in the promotion of Free Quality Education (FQE) in Junior Secondary Schools in Bonthe Municipality

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Abstract

This research aims to assess the role of the Ministry of Basic and Senior Secondary School Education (MBSSE) in promoting Free Quality Education (FQE) in Junior Secondary Schools in Bonthe Municipality, southern Sierra Leone. The study includes 100 parents whose children are enrolled in these schools as well as 100 principals and teachers who were chosen from five junior secondary schools in the Bonthe municipality. A purposive sampling method was employed for the teachers to gather data, while a simple random sampling approach was utilized to select respondents from the pool of one hundred (100) parents. The results showed that the MBSSE was ineffective in promoting the FQE program, as it was not regular in its responsibility as required by its education policy. The study also revealed that MBSSE had delayed paying school fee subsidies on time, this negatively impacting the JSS-level teaching and learning process. Despite this, the MBSSE has been moderately effective in providing furniture and basic school infrastructure for the past three years. The study proposes several recommendations, including ensuring timely payment of School Fees Subsidies to Junior Secondary Schools, providing adequate sitting accommodation to address the issue of inadequate accommodation due to the increase in enrolment as a result of the FQE program, improving technology for accurate, timely, and reliable data generation in Junior Secondary Schools, and recruiting more trained and qualified teachers to meet the current influx of teacher-pupil ratios.

Keywords: Role, Ministry of Basic and Senior Secondary Education, promotion, Free Quality Education, Junior Secondary, Schools.

INTRODUCTION

The benefits of investing in education have resulted to governments investing heavily on education of which Government of Sierra Leone is not an exception. Muchiri, P. K. (2012) notes

that although there is no priori adequate level of resources that a country should devote to education, the actual level of resources a country invests helps determine the quantity and quality of

education received by its children. A good education financing system generates an adequate level of funding while promoting efficiency and equity aimed at optimizing the distribution of education quality and its benefits among the members of society. Adequate levels of expenditure lead, all other things being equal, to optimum educational outputs and outcomes, while allowing for a balanced pursuit of other, competing social goals Muchiri, P. K. (2012). In developed countries, education beyond the compulsory level is usually financed in part and sometimes wholly by the state Banerji, R., Bhattacharjea, S., & Wadhwa, W. (2013). In Britain, education up to secondary school level is fully financed by the government Tsisiga, M. J. (2018).

In August 2018, Government of Sierra Leone (GoSL) launched a phased Free Quality School Education (FQE) initiative that provides free admission and tuition to all children in government-approved schools. While the initiative is timely and well received, many children are still out of school, at risk of dropping out or not benefiting from this initiative, as they live in remote rural communities where there are no schools or schools are yet to be approved by the government to qualify for the FQE. Furthermore, due to high and persistent levels of poverty, parents are unable to pay the direct and indirect costs of education even with the FQE initiative. The Free Quality School Education (FQE) program in Sierra Leone is dedicated to the promotion of quality education to the Republic of Sierra Leone. The objective is to increase nationwide access to quality pre-primary, primary, and secondary school, as well as school-level technical and vocational education and training. The goal is that All children will be able to successfully complete basic education and be prepared to move on to pursue higher education or training as appropriate for the workforce needed for national development. It ensures that all costs for formal school education are covered by the Government of Sierra Leone and requires parent/guardians to take responsibility for auxiliary costs according to the ability to pay.

In line with the Medium-Term Development Plan 2019–2023 (MTNDP) "Education for Development" – the government of Sierra Leone has implemented a Free Quality Education (FQE) program for basic and senior secondary education through fees waivers and provision of core textbooks (Math, English, and Science); school feeding in partnership with WFP in vulnerable communities; and consequently, there has been a significant increase in the number of school teachers. However, in all of these initiatives, the Infrastructural facilities in these institutions are not suitable for the needs of children with disabilities Žganec, N., & Opačić, A. (2021). There is power, WASH facilities, and spacious classrooms. However, other structures such as residential/hostel facilities, disability friendly structures, school buildings, and transportation are not enough. Transportation for staff is non-existent Lamin, A. (2023). According to Ali, M., & Isaac, O. O. (2023) states that special schools (including inclusive school providing special education) lack physical facilities such as classrooms, furniture, transport, communication and other logistics required for special education of children with disabilities or susceptible to developmental impediments. Lamin, A. (2023) stated that limited access to/or inaccessibility to specific structural facilities in reality impedes equal prospects for learners with special education needs.

Parents are only required to ensure that children attend school. In Britain, Education Authority and Central Government are required by Section 7 of the 1944 Act to make education facilities available.

This enables parents to carry out their legal duty. Parents are seen as the school's prime legal clients until the child is 16 years of age. Section 36 of the Act states that it shall be the duty of the parent of every child of compulsory school going age to cause him to receive full-time education suitable to his age, ability, and aptitude, either by regular attendance at school or otherwise Brickhill, J., & van Leeve, Y. (2018) In South Africa, user fees are identified as a barrier to education Dass, S., & Rinquest, A. (2017).

While school budgets are funded by allocations from state revenue, school fees are required to supplement these budgets so that schools are able to run smoothly. The South Africa School Act (SASA) provides that a majority of parents at a public school may determine whether or not school fees are charged and the amount to be paid. There are however exemptions from paying school fees for parents who cannot afford to pay. Exemption is extended to parents whose income is less than 30 times, but not more than 10 times the amount of fees Dass, S., & Rinquest, A. (2017). From the above examples, it is evident that education cost has to be borne either by the state or by the state in conjunction with parents and other beneficiaries. Only effective financing of education will enable nations to achieve Education for All and realize the quality and equity dimensions of education provision. In its Sessional Paper Number 10 of 1965, the Kenyan government committed itself to the eradication of ignorance, poverty and disease. In 2000, the Parliament enacted the children's Act, which recognizes education as a basic right to all children. This Act states the responsibility of the parents and the government in providing education to the child. However, most Kenyans live below the poverty line. Therefore, children from low-income families are unable to meet the rising cost of education Kariuki, J. M. (2018). To ensure that every Kenyan child has attained basic education, the government of Kenya introduced Free Primary Education (FPE) in January, 2003. In a follow-up to the FPE programme, the government introduced Free Secondary Education in 2008. According to the Kenya Institute of Public Policy Research and Analysis (KIPPRA, 2007), the primary constraint in the provision of quality education and training, as in other social services sectors of the economy, has been lack of sustained economic growth to absorb the shortterm reform shocks. The assessment by KIPPRA observes that the level of poverty in the country has gone up and the plight of the poor aggravated to an extent where many Kenyans can no longer get access to this basic need because they simply cannot cost share. For example, KIPPRA (2007) showed that the number of secondary school students in absolute need for bursary assistance went up from 155,000 to 400,000 in the year 2006.

Education service delivery is informed by accurate and reliable data for effective implementation. To monitor and evaluate the performance of education service delivery, credible data and information is needed from schools to facilitate planning and mapping out of policies that enhance growth and development, as well as to inform decisions McBurnie, C. (2021). In Sierra Leone, there are a total of 12,168 schools across the country and these schools had 3,131,440 pupils enrolled and 80,744 teachers.

The concept of data-driven decision-making in education, or data use for short, is receiving increased attention in many nations. We expect teachers to make excellent decisions, which means that in addition to experience and intuition, their decisions must be supported by data. This is the main cause of this. Data use can improve schools by raising student achievement, according to several studies Schildkamp, K., Poortman, C., Luyten, H., &

Ebbeler, J. (2017). Teachers can determine their students' learning needs and modify their instruction based on these needs by using data, such as assessment and classroom observation data. Better learning outcomes for students may result from this.

In general, data refers to information that is methodically gathered and arranged to depict a certain facet of educational institutions Alsaleh, A. A. (2023). The term "data" refers not only to assessment results and other types of student achievement data, but also to any other type of quantitative or qualitative data that is structurally collected and provides insight into how the school operates. Examples of such data include student background information, classroom observations, teacher interviews, or building information. This kind of decision-making, known as data-based decision-making, can be applied to schools Schildkamp, K., Poortman, C., Luyten, H., & Ebbeler, J. (2017).

There is increasing policy pressure on schools to use data. Schools are expected to use data to improve their quality, and governments are increasingly holding schools accountable for this. Policy pressure, for example, from policies such as "No Child Left Behind" in the US, can lead to schools using data only for accountability purposes Ebbeler, J., Poortman, C. L., Schildkamp, K., & Pieters, J. M. (2016). However, in order for data-based decision making to lead to school improvement in terms of increased student achievement, it is crucial that data are also used for school development and instructional purposes. Therefore, we need to study the extent to which school staff use data for accountability, school development, and instructional purposes.

We also need to learn more about the various elements that can help or impede effective data use in order to be able to support schools in their use of data and to offer them effective professional development. This has already been researched Schildkamp, K., Poortman, C., Luyten, H., & Ebbeler, J. (2017), mostly through qualitative small-scale research conducted in the United States. Extensive quantitative research is deficient. While comprehensive qualitative investigations can yield a wealth of rich insights into the ways in which specific factors impact data use, they are unable to tell us how much of an impact they have or which factors are most important.

Objectives of the Study.

The research objectives were to:

1. Find out the role of MBSSE in the provision of furniture and basic school infrastructure for the past three years
2. Examine the frequency of School Quality Assurance, Management and Resource official from MBSSE in the supervision of schools
3. Determine the reasons for the late payment of school fess subsidies
4. Investigate why the lack of accurate, timely and reliable data in the schools

Research Questions

1. What are the roles of MBSSE in the provision of furniture and basic school infrastructure for the past three years?
2. How frequently are School Quality Assurance, Management and Resource official from MBSSE in the supervision of schools?
3. What are reasons for the late payment of school fess subsidies

4. What is responsible for the lack of accurate, timely and reliable data in the schools

Methodology

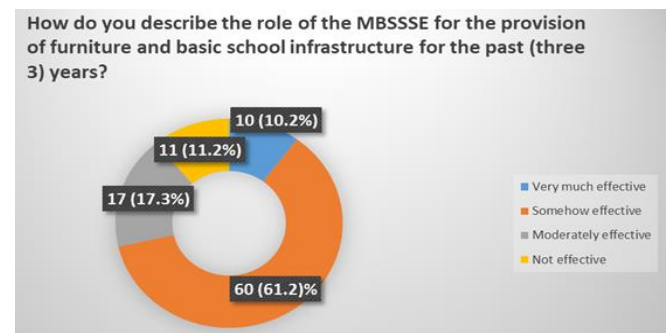
The study employed a case study research design. This type of design was chosen, as it is easy to collect the detailed data. The case study design is also less expensive compared to experimental or survey design, the participation of researcher in the study can be easily done and data collection methods like interview, observation, questionnaire and focus group discussion can be done easily Jørgensen, L.et al, (2016).Through case study design, the researcher collects both primary data from education stakeholders and some secondary data from previous conducted research reports, documents and library.

Result and Discussion

Analysis for Answering the Research Questions

Research Question One: What are the roles of MBSSE in the provision of furniture and basic school infrastructure for the past three years?

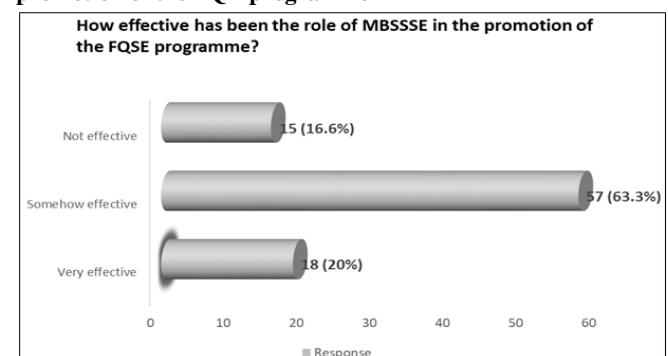
Figure 1. Describing the role of MBSSE in the provision of furniture and basic school infrastructure for the past three years



Source: Field survey 2023

Figure1. shows that 10(10.2%) of the respondents are of the opinion that MBSSE has been very much effective in the provision of furniture and basic school infrastructure for the past three years; 60(61.2%) stated that MBSSE had been somehow effective in the provision of furniture and basic school infrastructure for the past three years; 17(17.3%) said MBSSE had been moderately effective in the provision of furniture and basic school infrastructure for the past three years; whilst 11(11.2%) contested that MBSSE has not been effective in the provision of furniture and basic school infrastructure for the past three years.

Figure 2. How effective has been the role of MBSSE in the promotion of the FQE programme

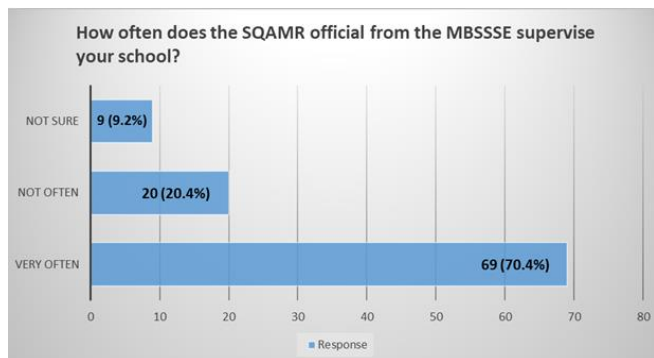


Source: Field survey 2023

Figure 2 indicates that, 18(20%) of respondents are of the view that the MBSSE is very effective in the promotion of the FQE programme; 57(63.3%) are of the view that the MBSSE is somehow effective in the promotion of the FQE programme; whilst 15(16.6%) are of the view that the MBSSE is not effective in the promotion in the FQE programme. The effectiveness of the MBSSE is responsible for the increase service delivery in teaching and learning field.

Research Question Two: How frequently are School Quality Assurance, Management and Resource official from MBSSE in the supervision of schools?

Figure 3.How does the SQAMR officials from MBSSE Supervise Schools.

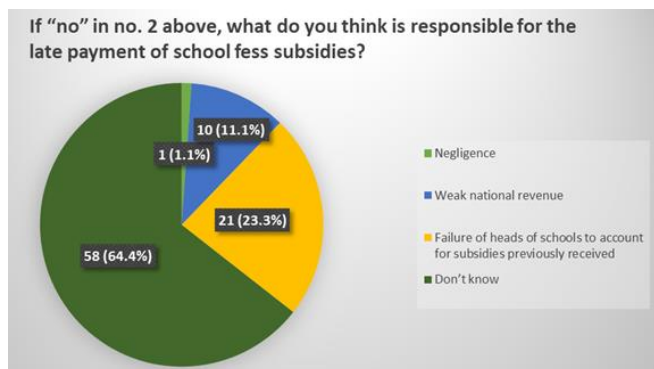


Source: Field survey 2023

Figure 3. indicates that, 69(70.4%) of respondents are of the opinion that School Quality Assurance, Management and Resource (SQAMR) official from the Ministry of Basic and Senior Secondary School Education (MBSSE) very often supervise their school; 20(20.4%) are also of the opinion that School Quality Assurance, Management and Resource (SQAMR) official from the Basic and Senior Secondary School Education (MBSSE) very often supervise their school whilst 9(9.1%) stated that they are not sure whether School Quality Assurance, Management and Resource (SQAMR) official from the Ministry of Basic and Senior Secondary School Education (MBSSE) very often supervise their school.

Research Question Three: What are reasons for the late payment of school fess subsidies

Figure 4.Reason responsible for the late payment of School Fees Subsidies

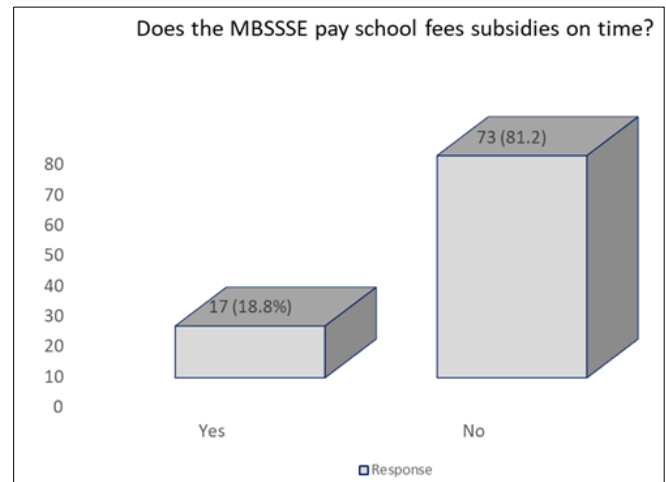


Source: Field survey 2023

Figure 4 shows that, 1(1.1%) of the respondents believe that negligence is responsible for the late payment of school fees subsidies; 10(11.1%) believe that a weak national revenue is

responsible for the late payment of school fees subsidies; 21(23.3%) believe that failure of heads of schools to account for school fees subsidies previously is responsible for the late payment of school fees subsidies whilst a greater proportion of the respondents 58(64.4%) maintained that that they don't know what is responsible for the late payment of school fees subsidies.

Figure 5 MBSSE payment of school fees subsidies on time

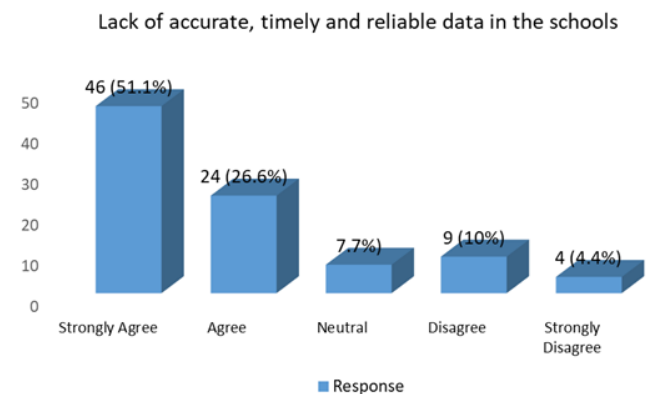


Source: Field survey 2023

Figure 5 shows that 73(81.2%) respondents are of the firm belief that MBSSE doesn't pay school fees on time whilst a low number of respondent 17(18.8%) states that they pay school fess subsidies on time. The result shows that late payment of school fees subsidies may lead to an unprecedented breakdown in the teaching and learning process.

Research Question Four: What is responsible for the lack of accurate, timely and reliable data in the schools?

Figure 6 Lack of accurate, timely and reliable data in the schools



Source: Field survey 2023

According to Figure 6. 46(51.1%) of the respondents strongly agree that lack of accurate, timely and reliable data in the schools is a challenge in the implementation of the FQE programme; 24(26.6%) agree that lack of accurate, timely and reliable data in the schools is a challenge in the implementation of the FQE programme; 7(7.7%) remained neutral that lack of accurate, timely and reliable data in the schools is a challenge in the implementation of the FQE programme; 9(10%) disagree that lack of accurate, timely and reliable data in the schools is a challenge in the implementation of the FQE programme whilst 4(4.4%) strongly disagree that lack of accurate, timely and reliable data in the

schools is a challenge in the implementation of the FQE programme.

Discussion of Findings

Based on the analysis presented in Figure 1&2, it is evident that MBSSE has been somehow effective in the provision of furniture and basic school infrastructure for the past three years. The research findings in the literature presented indicated that Infrastructural facilities in these institutions are not suitable for the needs of children with disabilities Žganec, N., & Opačić, A. (2021), these findings are not consistent with the current findings. Ali, M., & Isaac, O. O. (2023) conducted a study and found out that special schools (including inclusive school providing special education) lack physical facilities such as classrooms, furniture, transport, communication and other logistics required for special education of children with disabilities or susceptible to developmental impediments. Conversely, the present results indicate that MBSSE has been somehow effective only in the provision of furniture and basic infrastructure. Limited access to/or inaccessibility to specific structural facilities in reality impedes equal prospects for learners with special education needs. The results are consistent with the previous findings Lamin, A. (2023)

The result of the finding in figure 3 indicated that School Quality Assurance, Management and Resource (SQAMR) official from the Basic and Senior Secondary School Education (MBSSE) very often supervise their school which confirms that there was effective monitoring on going. The results are consistent with the previous findings that state monitoring and evaluating the performance of education service delivery, is needed from schools to facilitate planning and mapping out of policies that enhance growth and development, as well as to inform decisions McBurnie, C. (2021).

According to the analysis shown in Figure 4, the results revealed that majority of the respondents are unaware of the reason behind the late payment of the school fee subsidies. This implies that MBSSE is neglecting its responsibility in providing quality service delivery. Additionally, the present findings are in line with Muchiri, P. K. (2012) who argue that adequate levels of expenditure lead, all other things being equal, to optimum educational outputs and outcomes, while allowing for a balanced pursuit of other, competing social goals.

The result shows in figure 5 indicated that late payment of school fees subsidies. This implies that MBSSE is ignoring its responsibility in providing quality service delivery and this may lead to an unprecedented breakdown in the teaching and learning process. The results are consistent with the previous findings that although there is no priori adequate level of resources that a country should devote to education, the actual level of resources a country invests help determine the quantity and quality of education received by its children. Muchiri, P. K. (2012).

The analysis presented in figure 6 indicated the Lack of accurate, timely and reliable data in the schools. This poses a serious challenge in the implementation of the FQE programme. The result are inconsistent with the previous findings that Data use can improve schools by raising student achievement, according to several studies Schildkamp, K., Poortman, C., Luyten, H., & Ebbeler, J. (2017). There is increasing policy pressure on schools to use data. Schools are expected to use data to improve their quality, and governments are increasingly holding schools accountable for this. Policy pressure, for example, from policies such as “No Child Left

Behind” in the US, can lead to schools using data only for accountability purposes Ebbeler, J., Poortman, C. L., Schildkamp, K., & Pieters, J. M. (2016). This findings are not consistent with the research findings.

Conclusion and Recommendations

From the forgone data analysis, the researcher thus concludes that the aim of the research has been achieved. The role of the Ministry of Basic and Senior Secondary School Education in the promotion of Free Quality Education (FQE) in Junior Secondary Schools in Bonthe Municipality has been answered and therefore, the study objectives met with apt recommendations following in this section.

Conclusively, the role of MBSSE in the provision of furniture and basic school infrastructure for the past three years, the frequency of School Quality Assurance, Management and Resource official from MBSSE in the supervision of schools, late payment of school fess subsidies and the lack of accurate, timely and reliable data in the schools and above all the underpinning challenges encountered could get worse if the trend continue unchecked. Government must ensure that with the passing into law of the Education Act 2023, School Quality Assurance, Management and Resource (SQAMR) officials are given space and attention to sensitize both school authorities and the general public about the commitment of government to promoting the FQE programme and the expected role of parent to complementing the effort of government for the accelerated academic growth of their children.

Based on the findings of the study, the researcher recommends the following:

1. Government of Sierra Leone (GoSL) through the Ministry of Basic and Senior Secondary Education (MBSSE) should consider training workshops and seminars for Parents on Government commitment to promoting the FQE programme in Sierra Leone and the expected role of parents to complementing the effort of government.
2. The Ministry of Basic and Senior Secondary School Education (MBSSE) should train their School Quality Assurance, Management and Resource (SQAMR) officials on media engagement ethics for the onwards sensitization of the public on the FQE programme and their expected role as parents.
3. The School Board of Governors of Junior Secondary Schools must ensure that school authorities prioritize sensitization of parents about the FQE programme.
4. Government of Sierra Leone (GoSL) must ensure the timely payment of School Fess Subsidies to schools to Junior Secondary Schools and where there is any form of delay, promptly inform parents about the reasons for the delay in a bid to prevent any negative feelings from the community.
5. Government through MBSSSE should provide adequate sitting accommodation to Junior Secondary Schools in a bid to tackle the problems inadequate accommodation due to the increase in enrolment rate as a result of the FQE programme.
6. MBSSE should improve on technology for the generation of accurate, timely and reliable data in the Junior Secondary Schools and at the same time recruit a dedicated staff for that purpose.

7. MBSSE to recruit more trained and qualified teachers to meet the current influx of teacher pupil ratio of 1:45 in Junior Secondary Schools.

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