

Exploring Non-payment of School Fees in a Culturally Diverse Ex-Model C High School in Gauteng Province

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ABSTRACT In South Africa after the inception of the new democracy, learners from different cultural backgrounds are able to attend the school of their own choice without discrimination. A respect of individuals is thus promoted. In this study a qualitative design was used. The purpose of conducting this study using qualitative approach was to explore non-payment of school fees at the particular culturally diverse Ex-Model C high school. Using purposeful sampling procedure, a total number of all 160 grade eleven learners' parents/caregivers and eight School Management Teams (SMTs) were involved as participants. The researcher focused only on grade eleven learners because it was reported by SMTs that only few learners in grade eleven have paid school fees as compared to other grades. Secondly the reason why grade twelve learners were not included in the study was to avoid disturbing their academic progress as they were writing their final examination. Unfortunately the findings were derived from seven SMTs responses only, as they were the only ones who returned the questionnaires. This compromised the validity of this study because data was collected from a limited number of participants. The findings revealed that payment of school fees is a problem that needs urgent attention. As researchers we thus suggest the implementation of free education in order to allow equitable access to education for all learners. The recommendations in the proceeding section thus attempt to solve the mentioned problems.

INTRODUCTION

Within the South African context, changes that have occurred in the country since 1994 have compelled its citizens to adapt to a new social order and to engage with the realities of South Africa's rich cultural diversity. This has impacted on both the broader society and also on financing of schools. According to Ngobese (2005), the advent of democracy in South Africa, accompanied by the deracialisation has had an impact on the demographics of suburbs in all kinds of ways: racial backgrounds, cultural backgrounds and educational backgrounds.

In terms of the schooling system, the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa Act 108 of (1996), section 9(3) (4) ensures that individuals are protected from unfair discrimination. This means that learners from different cultural backgrounds are able to attend the same school without discrimination. This is further supported by South Africa School's Act (SASA) of (1996) when stating that a respect of individuals is also promoted. SASA of (1996) further recognizes the financial management of school and school fees by School Governing Body (SGB).

Background of the Study

One culturally diverse Ex-Model C high school in Gauteng province was selected for this

study on non-payment of school fees. Ex-Model C school in this study means the well-resourced school that was previously attended by white learners only. This is supported by Roodt (2011), when stating that Ex-Model C high school from South African context means those schools that were reserved for White learners only during apartheid era.

The school is situated in an urban area and is a multi-cultural and multi-racial high school with learners from different religions, cultures, languages and also different socio-economic backgrounds. A total number of 160 grade eleven learners' parents/caregivers and eight SMTs were involved as participants and they were requested to fill in the questionnaires. The reason why grade twelve learners were not included in the study was to avoid disturbing their academic process as they were writing the final examination as mentioned in the preceding section. All the questionnaires from the learners' parents were not returned and this compromised the validity of this study's findings. The researchers will thus guard against this weakness when the study is going to be conducted at five Gauteng high schools next year.

Theoretical Perspective

In order to explore and address the issue of non-payment of school fees in Ex-Model C high

schools, the researchers opted to work from an eco-systemic theory of Bronfenbrenner as stated by Donald et al. (2006) that ecosystemic perspective is an integration of both ecological and systematic theoretical insights. In this study this means that there is an interactive relationship of different levels of organisation in the social context. This theory is thus relevant and also links to this study because its four systems, namely, the microsystem, the mesosystem, the exosystem and the macrosystem interact with each other and form part of families, schools, churches, social clubs etc. In other words microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem and macrosystem in this study are respectively synonymous to families, schools, churches and social clubs. This means that if one system such as a microsystem (family) from the theory is negatively affected by say poverty, the learner from such a family will also be affected as she/he will not be able to buy prescribed books, school uniforms and food to eat. In addition, the school itself contains a number of subsystems, one of which is the learner who is closely involved with the family and society as a whole. Donald et al. (2006) support the above statement by stating that whole systems can interact with other systems around them. The school as a system may for example, interact with learners and teachers and also their parents in the family. Donald et al. (2006) further mention that the eco-systemic perspective's main concern is to show how individual people and groups at different levels of society (systems) are linked in dynamic, interdependent and interacting relationships.

Based on the above discussion, the study was therefore informed by the following research questions:

- Why is school fees not paid in high schools?
- How can the payment of school fees in high schools be improved?

Aim of the Study

The aim of this study is to explore the deterioration of payment of school fees in a culturally diverse Ex-Model C high school in order to draw guidelines that might assist schools in improving payment of schools fees in schools. The reason why the researcher opted to explore this research topic is because she/he was approached by one of the School Governing Body (SGB)

who had a concern about the non-payment of school fees at that particular Ex-Model C high school.

RESEARCH METHOD

A qualitative design was used in this study. Henning et al. (2004) state that qualitative study is presented in language and is about the meaning constructed from the language that present data. Furthermore, according to Merriam (1998), the product of qualitative study is richly descriptive. For the purpose of this study a case study was used as the focus was only at grade eleven. According to Merriam (1998), a case study is intensive, holistic description and analysis of a single unit or bounded system. The researcher thus explored non-payment of school fees at the particular culturally diverse high school. The findings will be reported to the SGBs, SMTs and the Provincial Gauteng Department of Education after the completion and publication of the research study.

Data Collection

Data was collected through a questionnaire based on non-payment of school fees. The questionnaire was used in order to provide the information required for non-payment of school fees in high schools. SMTs and grade eleven learners' parents/caregivers were the participants. They were expected to complete two sections. Section A was based on personal information. Questions were thus based on home language, gender, marital status, residential area, educational qualification, employment status occupational category, income bracket per month, number of learners attending school etc. This personal information will attempt to answer the research question in this study because of the following reasons: If parents and SMTs for example are staying near the school, their children will not spend much money on transport. If they are better qualified, they will be able to pay school fees as they will be falling within a better income bracket. If they are having one upto three children, they will be able to support them educationally thus be able to pay school fees. Section B was based on possible reasons and solutions for non-payment of school fees according to economic, social, political and school environmental factors.

School Fees Exemption

Section 40 of the South Africa School's Act (SASA) of (1996) states that a parent is liable to pay school fees unless she/he has been exempted in terms of the above Act. This Act prescribes how a school should manage its funds, exemptions, collections and enforcement of the payment of school fees.

There are thus parents who are legally exempted from paying school fees, however in this study non-payment of school fees refers to when a parent who does not qualify for school fees exemption defaults on the payment of school fees.

To complicate the matter of the exemption of school fees, the exemption of school fees may vary according to what the community considers affordable, SASA of (1996). Affordability in this context refers to what a particular school is expected to exempt learners from paying school fees if their parents' income falls below a prescribed means test. This means that there is a formula used, which usually combines the parent's income and the number of school-going children in relation to the annual school fees set by the SGBs. Children from foster care or child-headed families and those receiving social grants are automatically eligible for full exemption of school fees irrespective of their income. The exemption of school fees appears to be a good idea, but the researcher argues that at least a compromise of partial reimbursement be considered. This means that there should be a partial exemption from school fees payment by those parents who receive a very low income. This to me as a researcher implies that non-payment of school fees should be reasonably discouraged and more bursaries be awarded to achieving learners at all South African high schools.

Quintile Ranking of Schools

The quintile ranking determines the amount of money that a school receives from the Provincial Government each year as recommended by the National Department of Education, Government Gazette (1998). The school allocation is calculated by multiplying the learner allocation by the number of learners enrolled at the school (See Table 1).

Table1: Quintile ranking of schools

Quintile	2007	2008	2009	2010
Quintile 1	R738	R775	R807	R855
Quintile 2	R677	R711	R740	R784
Quintile 3	R554	R581	R605	R641
Quintile 4	R369	R388	R404	R428
Quintile 5	R123	R129	R134	R147

From the Table 1 on quintile ranking of schools, the poorest schools receive greatest money per learner allocation as there is a greatest increase in allocations in the lower quintiles. The upper quintiles such as quintile 5, do not even keep up with inflation every year. This forces schools in wealthier communities to raise funds to make ends meet. From the preceding discussion, one can see that the quintile system still promote the uneven distribution of allocation of funds in South African schools which may lead to the inequality of resources. In other words, the previously advantaged schools receive less annual budget from the Provincial Government than previously disadvantaged schools as stated in the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa (1996).

The above statement also applies to the high school where the research was conducted. The reason is that the school is categorised under wealthy schools, with a composition of learners from a better socio-economic background as compared to the disadvantaged high schools. This means that this high school is perceived to be amongst the better schools where learners from better family backgrounds are accommodated with no problems of paying schools fees. But for some reasons, that is, including the freedom of choice and quality of education, some poor learners are also accommodated at this high school. This contributes to the school's financial constraints because many learners are exempted from paying school fees. This means that the school accommodates both learners falling under payment and non-payment of school fees. In this context, the school is disadvantaged by the composition of the learners.

The Role of School Governing Body (SGBs) in Ensuring the Payment of School Fees

The School Governing Body (SGBs) according to Nyambi (2004) is a group of people managing and controlling school funds and other school related matters. Schools have to there-

fore institute SGBs. Its role amongst others being to advise, plan and assist the principal in the financial management of the school as stated in the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, Section 16 (1996). This means that the SGBs as a legal body aided by The Federation of Governing Bodies of South African Schools (FEDSAS) should be responsible to supplement school fees. This can be done through fund raising as supported by SASA, Section 39 (1996) that urges SGBs to supplement the school's income.

No school can function effectively without paying school fees. It was from this context that the researchers were approached to collaboratively conduct a research with one SGBs member in that specific Ex Model-C high school with an aim of exploring non-payment of school fees.

Consequences of Not Paying School Fees in High Schools

If school fees are not paid, the school cannot run effectively as mentioned in the preceding section. For example, some schools have extra teachers or contract staff paid by the money derived from payment of school fees. These extra teachers are employed in order to have a manageable teacher–learner ratio (the norm is 1 teacher to 35 learners). The Federation of Governing Bodies of South African Schools, which represents governing bodies of 1100 schools, strengthens the above idea by stating in The Times newspaper, 27 Friday November (2009) that financial pressure would increase if parents are unable to pay school fees which might and this will thus lead to the:

- ♦ Increase of school fees, doubling the rate of inflation with an aim of compensating the fee exemptions granted to poorer parents.
- ♦ Number of parents who do not pay school fees will increase yearly as the country is in the recession.

From the above two points, the researchers added another point that parents will have less money to buy antiretroviral medicine in those circumstances and that may also lead to more child-headed families. When one sees all these consequences from non-payment of school fees, one wonders what the improvement could be and this was attempted in the proceeding section in the form of recommendations.

Compliance with Ethical Standards

The following ethical measures were adhered for this research:

- ♦ The research proposal was submitted to the relevant committees at school, that is, the Principal, SMTs and SGBs.
- ♦ Consent was obtained from the Gauteng Department of Education (GDE) district office. A GDE permission form was completed.
- ♦ Permission to conduct the research was obtained from the Principal, SMTs and SGBs of the school.
- ♦ Consent forms, together with an information letter, was given to the grade eleven learners to give their parents/caregivers.
- ♦ Information letters included detailed information on the purpose of the research, how data will be gathered and how material will be stored, that is, for two years after the completion of the research.
- ♦ All reasonable efforts were applied in the research process to ensure confidentiality.
- ♦ The anonymity of the school and all participants were protected. Participants' details were not made known. Participants were informed that participation is voluntary and that they can withdraw from the research study at any time without any penalty.
- ♦ Participants were told that they will receive feedback on research results upon the completion of the study.

Findings

The data collected from the questionnaires were only based on eight School Management Team (SMTs) because the grade eleven learners' parents did not return their questionnaires as mentioned in the preceding section. This therefore serves as a shortcoming of this study. The reason for not returning the questionnaires were for example, that learners are not staying with their parents and it was difficult to get hold of them/ their parents. SMTs in this study are also parents because their children are enrolled at this school where the research is being conducted thus their responses were used representing that of the parents' population. Out of eight questionnaires sent out to eight SMTs, only seven were returned. Therefore the findings were based on the responses from those

seven SMTs thus cannot be generalised to the entire Gauteng province schools. The findings are thus stated below as:

Section A on Personal Information

- ♦ Most of the SMTs' number of teaching experience ranges from 6 to 26 years, with two SMTs having a minimum experience of 1 to 5.
- ♦ Regarding managerial experience and qualifications, all the SMTs have BA degrees as their minimum qualification. Two SMTs have MA degrees as their highest qualifications.
- ♦ Gender, there are two males and five females SMTs and the spoken language is predominantly English.

Section B on Nature of Financial Background

- ♦ Four of the SMTs have General Management, two have Finance Account one has Investment experience and Insurance background experience.

Section C on Financial Figures

- ♦ Four SMTs did not complete this section and two of them referred this to Mr pseudonym.

Section D on Reasons for Non-payment of School Fees

- ♦ Economic factors: one stated ...unemployment factor and another one stated ...an increased inflation factor. Four participants did not answer the question
- ♦ Social factor: two stated ...parents having a culture of non-payment of school fees.
- ♦ Political factor: two stated ...the right to free education.
- ♦ Religious factor ...they did not answer the question.
- ♦ School environment ...they did not answer the question.

Section E on Possible Solutions for Non-payment of School Fees

- ♦ Some SMTs responded by saying that possible solutions for non-payment of school fees can be ...awarding bursaries to dedi-

cated learners and also exempting the unemployed parents for non-payment of school fees.

- ♦ Social factor ...some SMTs stated that a new culture of being accountable be developed and also create a culture of paying school fees.
- ♦ Political factor...some stated that parents think that every one has the right to free education irrespective of their income bracket. One even further stated that ...parents need to be re- educated towards payment of school fees.

INTERPRETATION OF THE RESEARCH FINDINGS

The purpose of conducting a qualitative study is to produce the research findings. Through data collection and analysis, interpretation of the research findings follows bringing meaning to the data collected. In this context it will bring the understanding of non-payment of school fees in a particular Ex-Model C high school with diverse learners. It should therefore be noted that the questionnaire responses from the SMTs as participants in this study elicited a clear overview of the situation and a deeply insightful understanding regarding non-payment of school fees at that particular school. One can thus interpret the research findings based on the responses from SMTs who represent parents as stated in the preceding section by stating that:

Personal Information

Most of the SMTs' number of teaching experience ranges from 6 to 26 years, with two SMTs having a minimum experience of 1-5.

Managerial Experience and Qualifications

Regarding managerial experience and qualifications, all the SMTs have BA degrees as their minimum qualification. Two SMTs have MA degrees as their highest qualifications.

Gender

Gender, there are two males and five females SMTs and the spoken language is predominantly English with one SMT speaking Afrikaans.

The above information is important because it supports the fact that SMTs with their extensive teaching experience, managerial experience and qualifications have knowledge and the understanding of the policy documents on who pays /do not pay school fees. Goe (2007) supports the above idea by stating that experienced teachers may contribute to their schools in other important related matters. In this context it is both on teaching and the monitoring of the payment of school fees.

The researchers thus viewed the SMTs with their qualifications, knowledge and experience as school leaders who can play a role in motivating, supporting and interpreting the non-payment school fees policy, SASA Act and the Constitution of South Africa to all the relevant stakeholders.

Nature of Financial Background

Under the nature of Financial Background, the findings showed that the SMTs can with their financial background help parents during parents meetings understand why payment of school fees is important. This is supported by Fullan (2001) when mentioning that many learn to change if they see a point of it.

In this study it thus means that parents could commit themselves to payment of school fees if thorough discussions and explanations about the importance of payment of school fees are held.

One can therefore prematurely state that it is evident that there seem to be misunderstanding with regard to what the policy of non-payment of school fees is all about.

Financial Figures

This section was referred to Mr Pseudonym. This to us as a researcher means that Mr Pseudonym manages the finance alone. The researcher's interpretation of this idea means that the school financial figures are managed by an experienced qualified individual in order to ensure the smooth running of school related funds.

Possible Solutions for Non-payment of School Fees

Regarding possible solutions for non-payment of school fees, SMTs as participants re-

sponded by saying that bursaries should be awarded to dedicated learners and also exempt the unemployed parents from paying school fees. They also mentioned that a new culture of being accountable be developed and also create a culture of payment of school fees.

Section D and C made the researcher to assume that the Constitution of Republic of South Africa Act 108 of 1996 is not interpreted correctly by SMTs. They therefore need to be workshopped and taught about it by the Provincial Education Department.

CONCLUSION

The implementation of non-school fees payment has resulted in relieving the poor parents but the allocation of teachers, school infrastructure and personnel budget remains poor. This is complex and need to be reviewed further by both the National and Provincial Department of Education and relevant stakeholders.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the preceding discussion, it is therefore recommended that:

- ♦ More bursaries be awarded to dedicated learners.
- ♦ The government reviews the school fees policy in order to ensure that equitable and fair distribution of school fees allocations is done at schools.

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