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Principals' views on the implementation of the no-fee policy through the lens of capability theory

Emma Priscilla Barnett 

School of Education, Department of Education Studies, Sol Plaatje University, Kimberley, South Africa
emma.barnett@spu.ac.za

Rouaan Maarman 

Faculty of Education, University of the Western Cape, Bellville, South Africa

The purpose of the study reported on here was to investigate the implementation of the no-fee schools policy in quintile 1 schools in the Frances Baard district of the Northern Cape province. The South African schooling system categorises schools into quintile 1 to 5 schools, and, since 2006, disadvantaged learners in quintiles 1 to 3 have been exempted from paying fees. This study explored the perceptions of school principals regarding the implementation of the no-fee policy in the South African context, by applying a capability approach, which offers a novel perspective. In the study we used a descriptive design located within the qualitative tradition. Nine principals from quintile 1 schools were purposively selected as participants. Data were collected using semi-structured interviews, and a thematic framework was used for analysis. The findings indicate that the no-fee schools policy is only implemented partially by stakeholders (principals and school governing bodies). Furthermore, it was found that there is a lack of knowledge about the content of the policy which consequently inhibits effective implementation. Based on the findings, it is recommended that the Department of Education monitors the implementation of the no-fee policy more closely.

Keywords: capability approach; education; no-fee policy; quintile; schools; South Africa

Introduction

School fees have been abolished in several sub-Saharan countries. Primary education is free in Lesotho (Ntho, 2013:5); in Kenya, Ghana and Ethiopia, school fees have been abolished (Brown, 2006:5–6). Governments around the world invest in and support the provision of public education. The South African Government is committed to the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, 1996, declaring education as a basic right and compulsory to all (Republic of South Africa, 1996c). In South Africa, schools are categorised as quintile 1 to 5 schools. Since 2006, learners in quintile 1 to 3 schools (poor schools) have been exempted from paying fees (Department of Education, 2006; Mestry & Ndhlovu, 2014:1). During the apartheid era the education budget was unequally allocated according to race, with the major share of the budget being dedicated to the education of the white minority population (The Presidency, Republic of South Africa, 2014:4). Consequently, white minority citizens enjoyed better education resources than members of the African majority, whose education system was under-resourced, leading to limited access to quality education. Up to 1994, school funding was not distributed equally among South African schools, a situation that contributed to unequal access to education. To mitigate this inequality, the no-fee policy was introduced, as indicated in the Department of Education's Amended Norms and Standards for School Funding (Department of Education, 2006). Sayed and Motala (2012:674–675) state that the policy reforms were essential as it contributed to attainment of equity and redress in education financing. The aim of the no-fee policy is to assist learners from poor backgrounds to have access to quality education (Hall & Giese, 2009). The South African context is burdened with racial, economic and political histories that provide interesting research sites that add to insights such as principals' views on the implementation of the no-fee policy through the lens of capability theory.

Studies have monitored the implementation of the no-fee policy (Department of Education, 2006; Giese, Zide, Koch & Hall, 2009:39). Giese et al. (2009) found that there were serious challenges in relation to the implementation process of the no-fee policy, which indicates that principals, parents and officials of the Department of Education had limited knowledge about the policy. Mampuru (2012) and Nkosi (2011) also conducted studies relating to the experiences of no-fee schooling. Against this backdrop, this study used the capability approach to examine the implementation of the no-fee policy in quintile 1 schools in the Frances Baard district of the Northern Cape province. The capability approach is primarily a framework advancing two normative claims: that freedom to achieve well-being is of moral importance, and that understanding this freedom is to achieve well-being in terms of capabilities (Nussbaum, 2000; Sen, 1999). The approach, thus, emphasises the development of capabilities, and the capability approach could be a useful way to assess this development by analysing economic opportunities, political freedom, social facilities and protective security available to citizens, which will enhance and guarantee their freedom.

For the purposes of this study, we focused on opportunities such as education freedom, through the implementation of the no-fee policy, to be enjoyed by learners, teachers and parents at quintile 1 schools. The concepts "capabilities," "functioning" and "freedom" are central to the capability approach. Capabilities refer to what a person is able to do or be, and functioning represent what people actually do, the lives they live and their

well-being (Sen 1992:50). The core idea of the capability approach is that social arrangements expand peoples' capabilities, and promote or help achieve functioning. Nussbaum (2011:20) concurs that freedoms or opportunities are made possible through a combination of personal abilities and the political, social and economic environment. To achieve the aim of the study, the following question was posed: How do principals view the implementation of the no-fee policy in quintile 1 schools in the Frances Baard district of the Northern Cape?

The South African Context: National Norms and Standards for School Funding

The South African Schools Act 84 of 1996 (Republic of South Africa, 1996b) came into effect on 1 January 1997. The objective of the Act is to provide for a uniform system to organise, govern and fund schools, and it directs a clear message that the development of people's capabilities and talents is central to the kind of quality and access to education that is envisaged for all. The Amended National Norms and Standards for School Funding (ANNSSF) came into effect on 1 January 2007, and included the no-fee policy (Department of Education, 2006). The policy mandates that the funding for a school is divided into personnel expenditure and non-personnel expenditure, collectively referred to as school allocation. School allocations are intended to cover non-personnel, recurrent items and small capital items required by the school, as well as normal repairs to and maintenance of all the physical infrastructure of the school (Department of Education, 2006:26). The purpose of the allocation is as follows: "The school allocation is primarily and exclusively intended for the promotion of efficient and quality education in public ordinary schools" (Department of Education, 2006:30).

The no-fee schools policy, Sections 155 and 156, as outlined in the *Amended National Norms and Standards for School Funding* (Department of Education, 2006:45–46) stipulates that, to achieve the goal of providing access to education for poor children, a no-fee school may not levy compulsory school fees. For the purpose of the study we will refer to the section related to "no fee" as the no-fee policy 2006. The no-fee policy is implemented in schools by means of an assigned poverty score, which is determined on the basis of data from the community in which the school is located. The indicators used for this purpose are income, unemployment rate and the level of education of the community, all of which are weighted to assign a poverty score to the community and to the school (Department of Education, 2006). Learners in various communities are affected differently, because funding of schools differs. Schools serving the poorest communities, as identified by the member

of the Executive Council of a particular province, do not charge school fees.

The South African Schools Act (Republic of South Africa, 1996b) provides for the Minister of Education to make regulations concerning equitable criteria and procedures for exempting parents from paying school fees, and for identifying schools that will be no-fee schools (Department of Education, 2006:42). All South African ordinary public schools are categorised according to quintiles that relate to the poverty level of the community surrounding the school – schools in quintile 1 are in the poorest communities (Department of Education, 2006:24). The term "quintile" has particular importance for the funding of a school.

The government's strategy to alleviate the effects of poverty and to redress the imbalances of the past (Department of Education, 2006:42) is embedded in the no-fee schools policy for education. The principles underpinning the policy are that school fees should not be an obstacle for learners to access the schooling process, and that learners from poorer communities should be entitled to equal access to education, so that they can all, ultimately, improve their quality of life. These basic principles behind state funding of public schools are derived from the constitutional guarantee of equality and recognition of the right of redress. The state is obliged to fund public schools from public revenue to ensure the proper exercise of these rights (Department of Education, 2006:34). We argue that the no-fee policy serves as a remedial action by the government affording learners opportunities to attend schools and in so doing defend their human rights in terms of education. Redress is thus corrective in nature (Shale, 1999:31). The assumption of access and redress as principles underpinning the no-fee policy is based on the notion that access and redress contributes towards life opportunities, utilising resources, acquiring knowledge and strengthening skills. In so doing, learners are provided with the means to move easily from one learning context to another, so that the possibilities for lifelong learning are enhanced.

Theoretical Framework: Capability Approach

Education could be considered as a way to expand individual capabilities of people, provide them with access to the necessary resources, and ensure their ability to make choices that matter to them. Therefore, we deemed it necessary to explore the relevance of the capability approach as it relates to education. The philosopher, Sen (1993:30), states that

the Capability Approach is concerned with evaluating a person in terms of his or her actual ability to achieve various functioning as part of living and takes the set of individual capabilities as constituting an indispensable and central part of the relevant informational base of such evaluation.

According to Sen (1987:36), functioning refers to achievements, whereas capability is the ability to achieve. Functioning is more directly related to living conditions, while capabilities are notions of freedom that relate to real opportunities that people have regarding the lives they may lead.

Capabilities constitute people's freedoms and real opportunities to well-being, a situation in which individuals can use their possibilities and their power to the degree and in ways they choose (Sen, 1993:31). We conclude that functioning is what people really are and do while capabilities denote what people really can do and can be. In Sen's view, a person's well-being is judged by a "person's capability to do things he or she has reason to value" (Sen, 2009:282). According to this statement, if education is intended to enhance freedom and lead to development, the capability approach requires that the learning needs of all people must be met through equal distribution of resources. Education must be of the kind of quality that leads to learning outcomes that ultimately enhance individual freedom and choices. A fundamental idea of the capability approach is that a person's capability to achieve functioning that he or she has reason to value provides a general approach and yields a particular way of assessing the freedoms that people enjoy (Kedir, 2003:666).

Furthermore, learners from different households might live in different circumstances and bring different resources to school. Thus, it is necessary for us to come to an understanding of whether the implementation of the no-fee policy will assist all learners, irrespective of their socio-economic circumstances, to obtain quality education and expand their capabilities. Sen (1999) states that what people can positively achieve is influenced by economic opportunities, political liberties, social powers, and the enabling conditions of good health, basic education, and the encouragement and cultivation of initiatives. In terms of the above indicators, Sen (1999:10) argues that access to all of these means that to achieve freedom can enhance and supplement people's capabilities directly, and that these freedoms can reinforce one another. The instrumental role of freedom is thus concerned with the ways in which different kinds of rights, opportunities and entitlements contribute to the expansion of human freedom, thereby promoting human development.

Dieltens and Meny-Gilbert (2009:49) state that access encompasses more than physical access or getting through the gates of a school; instead, it includes the ability to participate and engage in meaningful education that fosters well-being. If the capability approach aims at focusing on the freedoms that people may enjoy, and the no-fee policy (Department of Education, 2006) is based on principles that aim at enhancing well-being and individual freedom, then we assume that there is a link

between the capability approach and the policy. The purpose of the no-fee policy (Department of Education, 2006) is to improve access to free and quality education for all South Africans; however, access to school is not sufficient, as learners must, once at school, make cognitive progress and attain curriculum outcomes.

Conversely, access is influenced by agency. A person with agency is regarded as someone who acts and brings about change, and whose achievements are to be judged in terms of their values and objectives, whether or not we assess them in terms of some external criteria (Sen, 1999:19).

In our view, agency signifies someone's ability and motivation to pursue goals that are valued in spite of constraints, and that good quality schooling fosters agency and develops freedom. In this regard, it appears that Section 13–16 of the no-fee policy (Department of Education, 2006:10) seeks to support and foster quality in education in that it aims to improve access to free and quality education for all. The capability approach complements this policy aim, in that it considers the goal of development programmes or policies as being more than alleviating absolute poverty; instead, these programmes and policies should enable all people to develop to their full potential.

From the foregoing, we can argue that education could be regarded as a capability – one that is supposed to equip learners with the knowledge and skills to use their material possessions, with innate talents in an environment in which to make informed choices, to lead full lives (Dieltens & Meny-Gilbert, 2009:49). It is imperative that, when a service is delivered, the expectations of the different stakeholders are taken into consideration, that services are evaluated, and consideration given to whom and under what circumstances services will be delivered.

Walker (2004:9–10) regards much of children's learning as being shaped outside the school, in families and in neighbourhoods, and she believes that the provision of resources and opportunities in school for children to develop, and the ability to learn, as well as the biographies of all learners, are implicated in, and impact on, the desires and possibilities of learners. The relation between the goods (well-being) and the functioning necessary to achieve certain ways of being and doing is influenced by conversion factors in the form of personal (physical condition, metabolism, reading skills), social (public policies, social norms, discriminating practices and societal hierarchies) and environmental (infrastructure, institutions, and public goods and services) characteristics, as described by Robeyns (2003:12). These factors are interrelated, and through the lens of the capability approach the diversity of human beings and their environments is acknowledged. The capability approach insists on scrutiny of the context in which economic produc-

tion and social interaction takes place, and of whether the circumstances in which people choose from their opportunity sets are enabling and just (Robeyns, 2005:99). From our perspectives, the objective of attending school is to motivate learners and ensure that they can make optimal use of their education, which, according to the capability approach, will enable their future social mobility and agency. Walker (2004:4) echoes Sen's (1992) view in that it would be a mistake to think of achievements only in terms of active individual choices, because society also has an influence on agency and the freedom to make choices.

This view relates to the principle of redress, which Dworkin (2000:113) refers to as compensation given to those to whom it has been denied. According to Keleher (2014:57), well-being may be enhanced or diminished as a result of agency freedom that extends beyond someone's direct control. Furthermore, Keleher (2014) states that agency freedom is what a person values and what a person attempts to produce, influenced by social, economic and political opportunities available to a person. The capability approach states that well-being can be limited by the power of the choices one has to make or is exposed to. To achieve the purpose, we had to answer the research questions and to realise the study objectives through the utilisation of appropriate research design and methods.

Research Design and Methodology

The qualitative research methodology was adopted to provide first-hand and in-depth experiences relating to the social world of the participants, by making it possible to interpret it from their frame of reference, and focusing on their participation in that world. According to Patton (2002:39), qualitative research uses a naturalistic approach that seeks to understand phenomena in context-specific settings, in which the researcher does not attempt to manipulate the phenomenon of interest. Thus, we chose qualitative research to collect data from the selected participants (school principals) in their natural settings and situations at quintile 1 schools. The choice of qualitative research implied that the study needed a qualitative research design to conduct a study on the views of principals on the implementation of the no-fee policy in quintile 1 schools. A phenomenological design, which Creswell (2014:42) refers to as a design for an inquiry in which the researcher describes the lived experiences of individuals about a phenomenon as described by the participants, was followed in this study. The phenomenological design enabled the participants to provide a description of their experiences and views of the implementation of the no-fee policy. The chosen research design and methods enabled us to observe and abide by the ethical measures. Merriam (1998:199) maintains that all research is concerned with producing valid and

reliable knowledge in an ethical manner. We conducted the study in an ethical manner by honouring the privacy of the participants, treating the participants with respect and seeking their cooperation in the research project. The qualitative approach required of us to have close and direct contact with the participants. We purposefully selected quintile 1 principals to participate in the study. All the selected principals were implementing the no-fee policy because the schools were declared quintile 1 schools by the Department of Education.

In this context, we conducted semi-structured interviews with the participants. In the study, the purposive non-probability sampling technique was used to select a sample of nine primary schools from a pool of no-fee primary schools in the Frances Baard district in the Northern Cape. The nine selected primary schools were located in the poorest of the communities in the Frances Baard district. For ethical reasons, we substituted the principals' real names with pseudonyms, Principals 1 to 9. The nine principals were interviewed individually and we made verbatim transcriptions of the interviews. The transcripts and documented information were reduced and categorised into themes. We made a tape-recording of the participants' responses and transcribed the recorded responses of the interviewees. The interviews enabled us to clarify participants' responses and to gather data-rich feedback from the selected principals. According to McMillan and Schumacher (2010:205), the advantage of using semi-structured interviews for research affords the researchers and the participants intimate, repeated and prolonged involvement – a process that enables the researchers to get to the root of what is being investigated. The issues that were addressed in this study using an interview schedule related to the implementation of the no-fee policy – challenges with regard to the implementation of the policy, as well as the positive impact of the policy.

A series of thematic codes were generated which specifically relate to the implementation of the policy. A thematic analysis is a search for themes that can be regarded as important for the description of a phenomenon. The process involves the identification of themes through reading and rereading of the data (Rice & Ezzy, 1999:258). The themes, which emerged from the data, became the categories for analysis. The formation of categories, themes and patterns formed the basis of the qualitative data analysis (De Vos, Strydom, Fouché & Delpont, 2005:337–338) and the data collected from participants were then grouped into categories of themes and sub-themes as it enabled an integrated exploration of the feedback provided by the principals. The various views from the principals were interwoven and interconnected with other components of the study to form the basis in response to the research question.

Findings

We argue that in the proposition that education policy ought to be beneficial to the citizens of a country (Hartshorne, 1999:5), policy needs to be analysed to explore how it may be beneficial to people. In an attempt to explore principal's views on the implementation of the no-fee policy, the following questions were posed to principals:

- What are the advantages and disadvantages for your school in terms of the implementation of the no-fee policy?
- What support is granted by the Department of Education for effective implementation of the no fee-policy?
- What are the positive aspects related to the implementation of the no-fee policy?

From the analysis of all the principals' responses, the following themes emerged: (i) challenges of implementation; (ii) support provided by the Department of Education; and (iii) positive aspects related to the implementation. The themes were based on the principals' experiences of the implementation of the no-fee policy.

The principals' responses to the first question were analysed by means of a theme identified with respect to their views.

Three principals mentioned challenges:

We are implementing the no-fee policy but it is not sufficient for all the needs of the learners. The budget does not allow buying equipment for extra-mural activities, because we focus more on textbooks for the learners (Principal 1).

The policy is implemented but we are not always sure how to use the money (Principal 2).

The implementation of the no-fee policy is a great relief for parents as they do not have to pay school fees, but parents do not want to contribute any more. Our parents feel the school must provide everything. We try to implement it, but our budget processes are not yet effective. (Principal 4)

Considering the participants' feedback, the lack of knowledge of financial management processes regarding the implementation of this policy could hamper, not only the smooth running of the school, but also the provision of adequate and quality learning and teaching resources. School governing bodies and principals are responsible for the financial management of schools. The principals themselves seemed to be poorly informed about how to allocate and spend the money provided by the Department of Education. Some of the principals' comments, "are not sure how to use money" and "our budget processes are not effective," may be ascribed to low levels of financial management skills. A lack of training regarding understanding policy content may contribute to ineffective implementation by the principals interviewed.

If we link the principals' feedback to the capability approach, we can conclude that, if principals and parents do not understand policy content, they would not know how to provide resources so that learners can achieve the things they value.

Principals and parents who find it difficult to implement the no-fee policy effectively may contribute to a weakening of the functioning and capabilities of learners, who are supposed to benefit from the implementation of this policy. From a capability perspective, we argue that the implication could be that learners who are denied valuable schooling opportunities are likely to be handicapped throughout their lives (Sen, 1999:284). Although the Department of Education makes monetary contributions for non-personnel expenditure, it seems from the comments by some of the principals that the schools do not know how to spend the money and follow strict budgetary procedures.

The second question posed to principals referred to the support provided by the Department of Education: What support is granted by the Department of Education for effective implementation of the no fee-policy?

Some principals indicated that they did not receive support with regard to implementation of the no-fee policy from the Department of Education. If principals and school governing bodies are poorly informed about how to allocate and spend the money provided by the Department of Education, the policy would be difficult to implement.

We implement the policy, but the Department of Education does not visit us regularly to assist in this regard. The money we receive is assisting the learners (Principal 6).

We were not trained with the school governing body to implement the policy. Parents also do not attend meetings when policies are discussed to get an understanding of this important policy. The money is not sufficient to buy all the resources we need at the school. (Principal 7)

Our school governing body has sometimes a different understanding of the implementation of the policy (Principal 8).

The Amended Norms and Standards for School Funding (Department of Education, 2006) is in accordance with Section 84 of the National Education Policy Act, 27 of 1996 (Republic of South Africa, 1996a). The latter Section requires that the Department of Education undertakes a monitoring and evaluation role, in a reasonable manner, with a view to enhancing professional capacities in monitoring and evaluation throughout the national education system, and assisting the competent authorities by all practical means within the limits of available public resources to raise the standards of education provision and performance.

According to the stipulation, it is expected of the Department of Education to support and monitor the implementation of the policy and the spending of funds, and to give the necessary guidance to schools to implement the policy effectively. This analysis suggests that a lack of knowledge regarding implementation of this policy would negatively influence learners' capabilities. Sen (1999:284) is adamant that "a learner who is denied valuable

schooling opportunities is likely to be handicapped through life.”

Notwithstanding the aforementioned negative experiences regarding the implementation of the no-fee policy, principals also provided positive feedback on aspects related to the implementation of the no-fee policy. The following are their responses to the third question: What are the positive aspects related to the implementation of the no-fee policy?

The learners attend school regularly as they are not afraid of owing money, like in the past (Principal 1).

More learners have access to the school and attend regularly because their parents do not have to pay school fees (Principal 5).

Our parents come to the school more frequently and participate in activities since the implementation of the no-fee policy (Principal 6).

The school has improved a lot with regard to resources to assist the educators and learners at the school. Parents are also more positive towards the school since the implementation of the no-fee policy (Principal 9).

From the above comments it seems as though the no-fee policy (Department of Education, 2006) is promoting access to schooling. The principals seem to agree that learners are attending school with more frequency than in the past. More regular attendance enables learners to use their material possessions, talents and the environment to live lives that are meaningful, and learners are seemingly given the opportunity to attend school, implying positive development and strengthening of their capabilities.

Access to education should thus not be compromised by misunderstanding or non-compliance to the implementation of this policy; thus, both parents and learners should be made aware that they need to exercise their agency to strengthen their capabilities.

Discussion

The findings indicate that the no-fee schools policy is being implemented at schools, although the participants reported that they lacked knowledge of financial management processes for effective implementation, and needed support from the Department of Education.

The Constitution (Republic of South Africa, 1996c) and the South African Schools Act (Republic of South Africa, 1996b) aim to ensure access to basic education and the provision of quality education for all learners. Considering the findings of this study, the no-fee policy (Department of Education, 2006) aims to redress the legacies of under- and inequitable development in education to ensure equal learning opportunities for all learners.

Sen (1999) regards education as an overarching capability that should expand other capabilities, whether gaining skills, or using the opportunities that these skills afford, or gaining other intrinsically

important capabilities. The aim of the no-fee policy is not only to provide equal access to quality education, but also to ensure that learners acquire quality education, as well as conceptual and practical skills, to develop their capabilities. These capability sets are necessary to promote learners' well-being and develop their educational capabilities. The empirical research revealed that the no-fee policy is being implemented with various degrees of success, and learners are benefiting from the poverty alleviation project. Although the principals indicated that the implementation of the policy involved a number of challenges, the no-fee policy (Department of Education, 2006) assists learners to access schools and receive quality education, and it means that parents are no longer obliged to make compulsory payments to the school to ensure the development of learners' capabilities.

Marovah (2013:603) asserts that it is the stimulation and commitment of the individual (agency) that makes functioning important for securing human freedoms, choices and opportunities to do and to be what people value. Regarding the implementation of the no-fee policy, the challenges faced by schools require the Department of Education to bestow what is exercised by the principals to advance (or regress) learners' capabilities. The Department of Education should put the needs of the people, principals in particular, who are the implementers of the policy at schools, first. We believe that what is important is the extent to which institutional arrangements expand or limit individuals' capabilities. The principals indicated that they did not have a good understanding of the policy, nor did the school governing body, and that they did not always receive the necessary support from the Department of Education. Section 34 of the South African Schools Act (SASA) (Republic of South Africa, 1996b) mandates the state to fund public schools from public revenue in order to ensure proper exercise of the rights of the learners to education and the redress of past inequalities in education provision. The SASA (Republic of South Africa, 1996b) furthermore expects from school governing bodies and education stakeholders to implement the no-fee policy accordingly.

Sen (1999:xi) explicates by stating that “although agency freedom is concerned with the freedom of the individual, it is also inescapably qualified and constrained by social, political and economic opportunities available to us.” This statement supports the conclusion that the challenges in the implementation of the no-fee policy is linked to internal and external factors present in school environments, which prevent the achievement of the policy's intended goal. The well-being of learners and the school is indirectly influenced or affected by conversion factors. Sen emphasises that well-being is influenced by various factors, and he states that “a properly described social state need not

merely be described in terms of who did what, but can also be seen telling us what options each person had" (Sen, 2002:593).

From the above discussions we conclude that the effective implementation of the no-fee policy requires agency, and that capabilities need to be expanded. Agency is related to well-being, and capabilities to opportunities, and, therefore, conversion factors that could influence the ability to achieve should be considered. The successful implementation of the policy requires a collective process by individuals, however, Sen (1992) asserts that possession of resources does not guarantee an improvement in the well-being of an individual or a group. The conversion factors in the form of personal (e.g. physical conditions), social (e.g. public policies) and environmental (e.g. institutions and public good and services) (Robeyns, 2003:12) must be considered too. Maarman (2016:6) states that, for resources to be converted into achievements, the capabilities possessed by all role players in the conversion process play an important role in determining well-being.

This study highlighted the importance of free education as a resource to address past educational inequalities in the South African education context (Sayed & Motala, 2012). Consequently, the epistemological contribution of this study can be found in our understanding of principals' perspectives in terms of the implementation of the no-fee policy. Most principals indicated that neither they, nor the school governing bodies were supported by the Department of Education regarding the implementation of the no-fee policy.

Conclusion and Recommendations

With this study we aimed at exploring school principals' views on the implementation of the no-fee policy through the lens of the capability theory. In the article we focused on opportunities to enjoy education freedoms through the implementation of the no-fee policy.

This focus was articulated in lieu of the proposition that education ought to be beneficial to the citizens of a country. However, we found that there were particular challenges regarding the benefits that citizens experience in terms of education freedom via the implementation of the mentioned policy. These freedoms are threatened by the following:

- some principals' inability to understand the content of the policy, which has a negative effect on the implementation of the policy, and
- a lack of support by the Department of Education regarding the implementation of the policy.

While opportunities to enjoy education freedoms are foregrounded, the mentioned challenges may contribute towards

- a weakening of the functioning and capabilities of

learners, and

- learners being denied valuable schooling opportunities.

In spite of these challenges, it seemed that more learners attended schools, more resources were available and parents participated in the school activities in the Frances Baard district. The fact that more learners regularly attended school was an indication that many did enjoy education freedoms to some extent, while opportunities for strengthening their capabilities could be regarded as a positive outcome.

We propose that the Department of Education cultivates a willingness in all stakeholders to attend meetings, and conducts conversations with all relevant stakeholders (parents, principals, school governing bodies, departmental officials) to teach them the meaning of policy content. Doing so is vital for successful implementation of policy, because such conversations could open the door to innovative thinking about the current needs of schools (and learners), and the feasibility of the implementation. It is also vital to build capacity, to reaffirm educational values and goals that the school perceives as important, and that could contribute to the well-being of all stakeholders, particularly principals, who are the agency drivers in the implementation of the policy. According to Steyn (2009), it is important that principals understand their leadership role as a process, that they develop human relationship skills, and promote joint action to ensure school improvement and effectiveness. The desired outcomes might be accomplished if principals and other stakeholders become contextually responsive towards the policies and practices that are implemented at the respective schools.

Challenges regarding the no-fee policy should be embraced, and the development of capabilities that will ensure quality education through implementation of all educational policies must be encouraged. The capability approach provides an opportunity to consider the characteristics of stakeholders involved in converting resources into valued beings and doings. The capabilities possessed by role players in the conversion process play an important role in determining well-being. The success of the implementation of the policy will thus require constant monitoring and support of stakeholders by the Department of Education. This support would probably empower principals to ensure the successful implementation of the no-fee policy.

Authors' Contributions

Both authors wrote the manuscript. Emma Barnett conducted the interviews with the principals. Both authors reviewed the final manuscript.

Notes

- i. The article is based on the doctoral theses of Emma

- ii. Barnett.
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