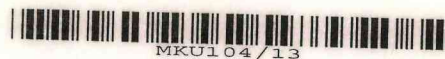


ASSESSMENT OF USER CHARGES ON ACCESS AND RETENTION
IN PUBLIC SECONDARY SCHOOLS IN GATUNDU NORTH
DISTRICT, KIAMBU COUNTY

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ABSTRACT

Charging for education which should be free is a global phenomenon. In developed countries, education is usually financed by the states. In developing countries, there are user charges which are levied in schools. In Kenya, the government is expected to meet tuition fees in schools while parents are to pay for other school requirements. After the introduction of free primary education in Kenya in 2003, many children were able to attend schools. However, at secondary level the user charges and other related direct costs are too high that access and retention of students in schools has remained a big challenge. The purpose of this study was therefore to assess user charges on access and retention in public secondary schools in Gatundu North District. The objectives of the study were to: find out the effects of user charges on access in public secondary schools in Gatundu North District, to determine the retention rate of students in schools based on user charges, to establish possible ways of enhancing access and retention in schools. The study is of significance especially to policy makers in ministry of education and technology, head teachers and teachers, local communities, donors, all the stakeholders in education and researchers. The study has reviewed related literature. The study employed classical liberal theory. The study has used a mixed methodology; qualitative and quantitative. The study employed a descriptive survey research design. The scope of the study was all public secondary schools in Gatundu North District. The target population comprised of 27 head teachers, 368 teachers and 1445 form four students. Stratified random sampling and simple random sampling were used to select 20 percent of public secondary schools in the district. A sample population consisted of 157 respondents. The data was collected using questionnaires for head teachers, teachers and students and document analysis was also used. The piloting of research instruments was conducted in one school in the district. Validity testing was done by requesting the experts in research methods to assess the relevance of the content used in the questionnaire. Reliability testing was done by using test- retest technique. Qualitative data was analyzed in narrative form while quantitative data was presented in frequency tables, charts and percentages. The study found that different schools charge different amount of user charges and students are frequently sent home to collect school fees. The amount of user charges levied in boarding schools were higher than in day schools. The study also established that user charges were paid promptly. The payment of user charges was good in form one but as students progressed was not good. The study revealed that majority of the parents had low income earnings. The study established that user charges deny access of some students in public secondary schools. The students also are forced to stay away from schools when user charges are not paid on time. This has affected retention of students in public secondary schools. The study therefore recommends for introduction of school vouchers, more allocation of bursary funds, lowering of user charges, allowing the parents to pay in kind, school administration to adhere to school fees guidelines, establishment of alumni, revision of government funds and introduction and development of more day schools.