

ABSTRACT

This survey examined and evaluated the operation of Government Cost-Sharing Legislation instituted in all Jamaican Public Secondary Schools in the 1994-1995 school year. This measure was introduced to reduce the cost of secondary education to the national recurrent budget by causing the parents of each student who is awarded a place in secondary school to pay an annual fee approved by the Ministry of Education and Culture directly to the institution.

The primary objectives of the study were to examine Cost-Sharing Legislation operation and to determine its impact on: -

1. Access to Jamaican Public Secondary Schools,
2. Equity within the Jamaican Public Secondary School System and
3. Public Secondary Schools' Budgets.

The sample consisted of ninety-three school personnel inclusive of thirty-one Principals, thirty-one Bursars and thirty-one Guidance Counsellors selected from 31 randomly selected Public Secondary Schools throughout Jamaica. These persons completed structured questionnaire. To obtain complementary information on the topic, structured interviews were conducted with Officials of the Ministry of Education and Culture who were directly involved in Cost-Sharing activities.

Data collected from questionnaire and interviews were subjected to descriptive statistical computation. The findings of the study revealed the following: -

I). Cost-Sharing impacts adversely on Access to Public Secondary Schools for some financially deprived students who are unable to pay school fees in order to access school places awarded to them. In the absence of Government Financial Assistance, Cost-Sharing contributes to increased students' drop-out-rate and absenteeism. For example, data collated in Table 4.2c reveal that under Cost-Sharing (1994/95 and 1996/97 academic years), an aggregated 4586 awardees did not access awarded school places in the sample schools to which they were assigned compared with an aggregated 3152 awardees who did not access awarded school places in the pre-Cost-Sharing years (1991/92 and 1993/94 academic years).

II). Knowledge, acceptance, and accessing of the intervening variable, Government Financial Assistance Scheme, helped to avert much of the negative impact that that Cost-Sharing per se could have had on Access to Public Secondary Schools. Data revealed that needy students who received Government Financial Assistance were likely to continue in school to (at least) the 11th Grade or 5th Form level.

III). The small fees sanctioned by the Ministry of Education and Culture for schools designated as '**low social currency**' (i.e. schools that are attended exclusively by students from the lower socioeconomic stratum of the Jamaican society - (especially schools with small student-population, schools in inner city communities and in very poor areas) created inequity/disparity/inequality among public secondary schools. These small fees approved by the MOE&C limit the availability of funds to provide the quantity and quality of other resources such as technological devices and basic teaching aid and equipment for some Jamaican Public Secondary Schools.

IV). Cost-Sharing also had negative impact on the budgets of some Public Secondary Schools and positive impact on the budgets of others. The significantly high school fees approved by the Ministry of Education and Culture for schools with **'high social currency'** (i.e. schools with mostly middle and upper class clientele); provide these schools with significantly higher income than they received under the previous Ministry of Education and Culture student per capita subvention funding system. On the other hand, the findings revealed that the significantly low fees approved by the Ministry of Education and Culture for schools classified as **'low social currency'** impact negatively on their annual income thus preventing them from honouring their financial obligations and from providing the basic necessities for the effective and efficient functioning of their school plants. (See Table 1.1 (p. 5) and Table 4.2h (p. 115). Table 1.1 reveals that for the 1994-1995 academic year, the Ministry of Education and Culture approved a fee of \$5,250 for a Tradition High School in St. Elizabeth and approved of fee of \$1,200 for Comprehensive High School in Portland – a difference in fee of 337.5%. Table 4.2h also reveals that for the 1997/98 school year the approved fees for Traditional High Schools and Technical High Schools range from a low of \$3,500 to a high of \$7,000, while the approved fees for other types of secondary schools range from \$1,900 to \$4,300.

V). As was predicted by some Cost-Sharing critics and analysts, the financial administrative staff of many schools proved incapable of managing effectively and efficiently the increased funds generated from Cost-Sharing. Misapplication and

misappropriation of funds, pilferage and other fraudulent practices resulted in many Public Secondary Schools.

VI). The Ministry of Education and Culture and many School Boards were not equipped with competent and vigilant auditing systems that could effectively and efficiently monitor the funds generated from Cost-Sharing in the Jamaican Public Secondary Schools.

Recommendations that might be helpful to education planners, policymakers, cost analysts and school managers are suggested in Chapter Five of the research.

Among the recommendations are: -

1. In order to decrease the disparity among schools the Government should make available **Bail-Out/Grant** from the Education Tax to schools with low approved school fees, small student-population and low income.
2. Many students neither paid fees nor applied for Government Financial Assistance thus preventing some schools from realizing their projected income. The Ministry of Education and Culture should give **Concessions to principals to apply for Government Financial Assistance** for students who neither pay school fee nor apply for Government Financial Assistance.
3. Work-Experience Teachers, Guidance Counsellors and influential Parent-Teacher Associations members should help students to find **Vacation and After School Employment**. The income from such employment would assist students with the payment of their school fees and with the private cost of schooling.

4. Several schools found the funding of security for school property and personnel a problem. Parent-Teacher Associations and Neighbourhood Watch groups should establish **Community Based Security** to provide protection for school properties and personnel.
5. Schools should ensure **Self-Sufficient Vocational/Practical Areas Projects** – Practical areas should produce items for sale to the school community. Profit accrued from this venture could help to lower school fees to students thus making it more affordable.
6. **Levies** should be placed on all privately operated businesses within each school community to help to finance schools in the area.
7. Schools should design a *School Fee Lay-Away Plan*, which gives parents the opportunity to lay-away school fee for the ensuing academic year (in the school's account) on an installment arrangement basis. This will ease parents of the pressure of financing the total school fee in a single lump-sum payment.
8. In order to ensure that **Parity in Curriculum Offering, Parity in Funding and Parity in Resource Allocation** exist between New Secondary, Comprehensive High and Reclassified Secondary and Traditional High Schools, the Ministry of Education and Culture should inject more funds into low-income schools to improve the physical facilities, improve teacher quality and improve the system for monitoring of schools' incomes and expenditures.