

Article

Evaluating the Impact of Zambia's Free Education Policy on Access and Quality of Education: A Case Study of Lusaka District

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Abstract: The African country of Zambia recently began offering free education to its citizens, making a significant attempt to remove finance as a factor limiting universal education for children in Zambia, especially in marginalized and low-income families. To assess the effect of this policy on the availability and quality of education in Zambia, the study measures enrolment, dropout, educational results, and school resources. Combining qualitative questionnaires filled out by students, teachers, and policymakers with quantitative data analysis, the authors observe a constantly enhanced enrollment rate, especially at the primary level, which testifies to increased access. However, student enrolment has increased sharply, resulting in overcrowding, heightened competition for educational commodities, and difficulty maintaining instruction as schools struggle with limited physical facilities, teaching aids, and trained teachers. Further, the policy has a positive impact on gender parity by allowing more girls to be in school, but it lacks a balance in the demography of rural/urban access and quality education. To achieve quality improvements in the long term, however, this policy review finds that policymakers must pursue policies that address both access and quality over the long term by investing in teacher training, physical resources, infrastructure, infrastructure, and overall policy coherence. These research results will be helpful for policymakers and indicate that further changes are needed to bring the benefits of grant proposals into full effect for Zambian free education.

Keywords: Free Education Policy, Access to Education, Quality of Education, Enrollment Rates, Educational Resources

Citation: Sata, S. K. Evaluating the Impact of Zambia's Free Education Policy on Access and Quality of Education: A Case Study of Lusaka District. Web of Semantic: Universal Journal on Innovative Education 2024, 3(5), 28-41.

Received: 7th Nov 2024
Revised: 14th Nov 2024
Accepted: 20th Nov 2024
Published: 28th Nov 2024



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1. Introduction

This right to education is among the most recognized fundamental human rights and the basis for social and Economic Development. This shows that in Zambia, education is more than an ability to read and write and or enable the individual to attain better employment; it means development and poverty minimization for Zambia. Admitted that most Zambian children from less privileged backgrounds have not been able to be educated, the government of Zambia crafted a policy that offered education for free to all children in Zambia. This policy, which eliminates tuition and specific other school fees at the primary and secondary levels, represents a significant commitment to achieving universal education and aligns with global frameworks such as the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, precisely Goal 4: Promote quality education for all and facilitate each person to receive equal educated as well as skill enhancements for their entire life.

The free education policy has increased the enrollment of students in Zambian schools, particularly in urban regions, Lusaka regions, and CT-inclusive areas. Lusaka,

however, is the largest district out of the ten and also the capital city, making a good case for the impact of the policy. Higher numbers testify to the policy's effectiveness in addressing the issue of affordability but also bring into focus other related topics such as quality, resources, infrastructures and facilities. Due to increased enrolment numbers, educational institutions are facing challenges like large classroom sizes, lack of qualified teachers, and more diminutive educational resources, most of which compromise the quality of the education attained.

This study assesses the twofold effect of Zambia's free education policy on accessibility and quality of education in the Lusaka District. In this regard, the research aims to shed light on the effects of such an increase in the overall standards and test results in the context of urban education systems, as well as recognize institutional barriers that may hinder the successful implementation of the policy. This study will collect enrollment data from school records and survey data from teachers, school principals, and other key stakeholders to examine the tension between access and quality. The outputs will advance the analysis of the impact of the Free Education Policy on districts under study, particularly urban regions, given the high population density and education demand, and further aid policymakers towards modifying the policy to fit the Zambian educational context to offer education to as many people as possible while maintaining quality.

In conclusion, this study will present a general assessment of Zambia's free education policy as practised in the Lusaka District, stressing the need for other reforms to complement the policy and enhance the country's education quality when accessibility has been expanded. It will also give policymakers and stakeholders in the education sector reliable information to improve the outcomes of free education in urban environments.

Literature Review

Extensive research has been conducted on how the concept of free education policies has been adopted in most countries to advance an educational and social agenda for low-income people. Zambian Free Education policy that commenced to respond to socioeconomic hindrances to education integrates other endeavours worldwide that seek to attain universal free primary and secondary education. The present literature review considers the theoretical background and empirical evidence regarding free education politics and the outcomes and specific issues identified within the Zambian context and in comparable countries.

Theoretical Foundations of Free Education Policies

The idea of freedom in education draws a solid premise from free education as a freedom in the positive that being educated is not only a personal entitlement but a collective societal good. This view of education is based on the rights of every individual, with the prime aim of developing the individual and society as a whole. That education for all is desirable is supported by the ethical, political, and economic arguments and paradigms, all of which call for an education system that has as little obstruction as possible for people to get an education, especially financially.

Human capital theory prevails in most discussions on educational policies, as the wrong policies argue for free education. The human capital theory, developed by Theodor Schultz and Gary Becker, is based on certain principles, including seeing education as something that improves the productivity and possibilities of a human being. In this regard, education enhances human capital regarding workers' skills, knowledge, and competence so that individuals become more productive, thereby improving the overall economic development of a given nation (Schultz, 1961; Becker, 1993). In practical terms, education programmes sponsored by the government that offer scholarships or reductions of fees enable more children from socially deprived backgrounds to embrace education.

When these people acquire education, they can enter the labour market and contribute economically to the nation's productivity.

Against this backdrop, Zambia's free education policy appears to be a strategic plan to unleash the demographic dividend by expanding the education variable to a more significant chunk of the population, particularly poor households. Through this policy, the cost of appareled schooling is reduced. It so is the opportunity cost to families, thereby increasing prospects for education for children who would otherwise have no access due to their class status. The abolition of school fees is critical most in rural and peri-urban areas where poverty levels are high, making school fees a significant hindrance to the ability of children to attend school. In that way, free education becomes a means of driving national economic growth while providing citizens with the chances for self-fulfilment and self-improvement.

This paper provided insight into the rationale for free education policies through a human-centred perspective using Amartya Sen's capability approach, which goes beyond mere economic reasoning. Sen and Suttan also believe the importance of education is unclear. Beyond the mere role of economic growth and development, he aligns himself with Nussbaum, who sees education as promoting freedom for people. To Sen, education is an instrument of contribution to the economy and an instrumental good that can help people have worthless lives they would want. In attaining knowledge and skills, people increase their chances of making more rational decisions about living, taking care of their health, voting, and engaging in other politico-social activities. According to Sen, the purpose of education is to contribute to education as an end; education as an end brings value to the individual and assists them in leading a life valued in society.

In Zambia's case, free education is an effort towards the direction of establishing Open Freedom, referring by Sen to freedom to expand one's capability to achieve education, the critical denotation of freedom of Sen. This is tough in all the aspects of development for the minority groups who had been socially and economically booted out from various opportunities in the society due to lack of education. The sustainability and opening of education at the primary and secondary levels is a progressive step towards the economic development of Zambia. At the same time, Att gives its citizens the time to access life's social, cultural and political dimensions. In this regard, the policy plays a part in preventing social disparities by giving a fresh chance to change the lives of individuals and become significant members of the community.

Moreover, the existing idea of education as an external benefit stresses the social value of the available educational opportunities. By its nature, a public good cannot be rivalled and excludable: no individual can be prevented from benefiting from a public good (if it is produced), and no action of a single individual can prevent others from enjoying the same benefit in a public good. While education, when available for everyone, is helpful to the congregation and, therefore, profitable with benefits that are more than just economic. The level of education empowers the population to make informed decisions, manage social issues and resources, and increase chances of improved health and social and political stability. It also creates positive externalities for decreasing crime rates, increasing participation, and improving the status.

Therefore, the government's provision of free education is not only an investment in personal human capital but a capital in the structure of society. Such a policy of Zambia allows all people to receive an education regardless of their position in society, which ultimately contributes to society's well-being and ability to weather all the challenges effectively. This is especially important in a country like Zambia, where there is substantial and emerging social inequality based on regional, gender pov and educational status) and where education input has been historically linked to social mobility and national development.

Therefore, the arguments that support the free education policy in Zambia are firmly anchored on economic, social and ethical beliefs. Human capital theory, which offers education expansion, holds that free education will lead to economic growth through improved productivity and participation in social activities. In contrast, Sen mentioned above pointed to a broader perspective on education and how the reason for free education goes beyond the mere economic enhancement of the people in the education provision but how it helps expand people's freedoms. From the perspective of addressing education as a public good, the policy was seen towards advancing such social values as social justice, good governance and social cohesion. Both theories offer a sound beginning for interpreting Zambia's free education policy as a positive change instrument whose purpose is to close the gap in educational inequalities and improve the country's forward-looking development and human enfranchisement.

Global Experiences with Free Education Policies

In Africa, Asia, and Latin America, free education policies have been adopted within a broad social justice framework to achieve the democratization of education, poverty reduction, and socioeconomic socio-economic development. They all produced mixed results, influenced by political profile, financial capability, and population factors. Uganda, Kenya, and Malawi are good examples of how free education policies could work and what problems may arise when trying to make education more accessible to everyone and discussing the overall potential for increasing access to education as well as the need for the system's further development to sustain its quality.

Such positive trends shown in many of the countries discussed above point to the proximal benefits associated with increased school access brought about by removing or scaling down school fees. Literature reviews have indicated that free education policies can create massive enrollment because tuition fees have been identified as the primary input that lower-income families cannot afford. For instance, Uganda's policy increases enrolment in education by providing equal education participation throughout the society (Al-Samarrai & Zaman, 2007). Also, investigations of free primary education in Kenya reveal that it positively impacted gender parity and dropout rate amongst target groups such as the marginalized (Nishimura & Yamano, 2008). Such outcomes align with the primary goal of free education policies, which is to ensure that/she provides equal access to education without discrimination by gender, socioeconomic status, and other factors. However, the rapid increase in student enrollment following the introduction of free education often exposes underlying infrastructural and logistical challenges within these educational systems. The surge in demand frequently leads to overcrowded classrooms, as existing facilities and resources become insufficient to accommodate the influx of students. In Kenya, for example, the number of primary school students grew sharply following the introduction of free education, leading to classrooms filled with double or triple the number of students for which they were originally designed (Bold et al., 2013). Overcrowded classrooms reduce the effectiveness of instruction, as teachers are unable to provide individualized attention and students struggle to learn in high-density, often noisy environments. Moreover, the physical strain on school infrastructure, including classrooms, sanitation facilities, and even access to basic amenities like clean water, further diminishes the quality of the learning environment.

These are further exacerbated by the scarcity of teachers, whereby few trained teachers teach the increasing number of learners. In many instances, governments have resorted to recruiting contract or otherwise relatively low-quality teachers due to enrollment growth, which tends to lower instructional quality. For example, in Malawi, the implementation of FPE led to increased enrolment, exposing an inadequate teacher workforce, and an increased student-to-teacher ratio, which goes against the procedure. This makes classroom management hard, and feedback provision or provision of adequate coverage

for topics that need to be taught is challenging, given the number of students teachers are expected to deal with. The latter leads to a depreciated education quality, as students get weaker educational exposure despite the newly gained access to education.

These challenges highlight a critical gap in implementing free education policies: an increase in commitment to adequate educational finance and human resources for improving quality education provision. On the positive side, high enrollment has been attributed to the excellent working policies that seek to demoralize total education fees; hence, there is a call for more extensive planning and funding to maintain education quality. These funds are often needed often to be increased need to be increased, as governments cannot meet the resource needs of an enlarged educational system. They are also a constraint to accommodation construction for additional classrooms and have issues with the the procurement of books and other teaching/ learning resources and the the professional development of teachers. Hence, regarding low revenue capacity countries, the pressure on Government budgets generates trade-offs where there is a struggle between enlarging access or increase

For example, Kenya's experience reveals areas for improvement inherent to underfunded free education campaigns. The free primary education policy by the government needed adequate resource commitment, which, therefore, came with low resource provision, meaning that the standards of education offered to the students were compromised. Donor-source funds are usually short-term short-term and partial to solving systematic and sustained problems; hence, most initial funding support comes from global bodies and development partners. Thus, donors find that when they reduce their support, schools need more dress, crowded classrooms, and a shortage of teachers.

Moreover, these challenges indicate the necessity of policy coherence in guaranteeing access and supporting the maintenance of educational quality through a more rational interlay of resources for learning. Therefore, these freedoms in free education policies must go hand in hand with proper investment in teachers, schools, and curriculums to ensure that free education means quality education when large enrollments happen. Policymakers in countries where demographics imply high youth enrollment should consider sustainable models that can still expand to accommodate future increases without compromising the quality of education enrollment. It means that coordinated actions of the governments, local communities and Indigenous people, the World Bank and other donors, and the partners in the private business sector should be aimed at providing emergency supplies for children in need as well as at identifying and implementing the key strategies and policy priorities for the development of the education system.

Last but not least, Uganda, Kenya, and Malawi gave the impression that free education policies should be country-specific and have the ability to evolve to meet challenges on the ground. A broad free education policy could also not successfully address the inequality in the distribution of resources and socioeconomic and cultural conditions that define the ability of education to be provided in different regions. Therefore, policymakers must be instrumental in constantly evaluating and updating the policies on free education and responding to emerging problems as they emerge. Monitoring and evaluating are crucial in determining where more attention is required to reach those in need to assist the governments in adapting the policies in question and allocating more of the available resources to the particular areas which will be most productive.

Therefore, the features of the free education policies in Africa, Asia, and Latin America provide vivid evidence of the possible positive shifts and potential problems regarding education for all. This opens up enrollment, especially among the financially challenged groups. However, its effects on infrastructure, teacher capacity, and quality of education show the importance of a strategic plan that goes hand in hand with financial liberalization. Who are other countries that have embarked on such policies from which they should learn? Zambia is not alone as it joins other nations in the race to attain the UN's millennium

development goal in education; Uganda, Kenya, and Malawi are among the countries that provide education for all but provide standard education aiming at offering a meaningful and impacting education experience.

Free Education Policy in Zambia: Context and Implementation

Analyzing the developmental history of Zambia, the paper will consider the post-independence educational system in detail and how it evolved to the present day and illustrate that the process of educational transformation is grounded in the vision of education as continuous improvement, as the tool for personal and national development. The early policies of post-independence, dictated by the period's socio-economic and political agenda, were aimed at deconstructing the effects of colonialism restricting education to most Africans. These policies focused on accelerated literacy acquisition and development of a human capital that forms the basis of Zambia's socio-economic development. Leaders of the country appreciated education policies as fundamental strategies for making the country economically independent and fighting poverty and illiteracy to produce an enlightened populace that supported the formation of democracy. These goals have persisted for decades as crucial 'Overarching', consistently prompting calls for reforms to increase schooling throughout Zambia and the horizon to provide education for all Zambians.

The free education policy introduced in 2022 can be understood as a further development of Zambia's educational reform narrative as a country willing to embrace the optimization of education accessibility for all, grouping it with the ideas of social justice. This policy addresses cost issues directly by abolishing school fees and other related costs at the primary and secondary school levels, meeting a form of cost that prevented the more significant population from attaining formal education. This policy is within the provisions of Zambia's Vision 2030 and the United Nations Sustainable Development Goal 4 on inclusive and equitable quality education for all, setting Zambia within a global agenda committed to education for all individuals throughout their lifetime. Such alignment accredits knowledge of national and global development priorities, not regarding education as simply a national development goal, but a common global importance towards bringing about the needed evolution, lessening inequities, empowering people, and making societies sustainable.

However, despite the boldness of this free education initiative, Zambia's education system faces entrenched challenges that pose risks to the policy's effectiveness and sustainability. Resource constraints are a persistent issue, as Zambia's fiscal capacity remains limited, making it difficult for the government to adequately fund all sectors while prioritizing education (Banda, 2020). Historically, educational reforms in Zambia have encountered obstacles due to an under-resourced education sector, which struggles with infrastructure deficiencies, insufficient teaching materials, and inadequate funding for teacher recruitment and training. With the introduction of free education, the demand for resources has intensified as enrollment surges, but budgetary allocations to education have not kept pace with these expanding needs. This financial gap is further exacerbated by the country's debt obligations and reliance on external aid, which introduce uncertainties regarding the stability and consistency of funding.

The problem with high student-teacher ratios is a clear example of the dilemma between the mobilization of education and the quality of education. With the expansion of the free education policy targeting the enrollment of more students, the current teacher population diminishes the proportionate client base to convey information to sizable groups of learners yet corals them together, thus hardly offering personal attention or adequate teaching hours. The quality of learning studies has significant significance, suggesting teacher-student contact as one of the crucial determinants of learning and the need for appropriate class sizes to enhance understanding. In Zambia, though, large class sizes

mean that individual attention to every learner is impossible for the teacher due to the sizeable student-teacher ratio instructional quality. This is more common in urban areas, where the population density is high and in rural areas, where many schools lack adequate teachers.

Infrastructural difficulties further aggravate the above-mentioned quality concerns; many schools in Zambia have dilapidated structures, or most work under constrained structures characterized by inadequate classrooms, electricity, water and sanitation. These institutions have experienced a very sharp increase in enrolment due to the free policy to cater, which has stretched beyond their current carrying capacities and needs severe infrastructural development, which is still needs to be attainable due to inadequate funds. Lack of school expansion and improvement of physical facilities may hinder the achievement of good quality education in Zambia due to congested areas and poor facilities. However, infrastructure deficiency disproportionately affects students in rural and marginalized settings and learning gaps before policy implementation and may reduce the policy's ability to address equity of education.

Previous literature documents these systemic barriers in Zambian educational reforms, underlining a tendency in which policy processes for educational expansion are regularly followed by an absence of complementary investments in quality improvement resources and mechanisms (Banda, 2020). Problem-solving policies of the past have included fee cuts and community education initiatives that boosted enrollment rates but have had implementation issues around maintaining existing quality as proportions continue to swell. Such a historical trend indicates that although the 2022 free education policy may optimally improve enrollment and minimize access hurdles, it may barely complement or compromise quality if complemented with weak, unsustainable, and selective policy support in teacher quality, curriculum quality, and school infrastructure.

The type of education being championed under the free education agenda today, despite having positive intents, poses pertinent issues regarding its feasibility in the future and its side effects on education. At the moment, the policy covers much ground. Still, it could be more sustainable in terms of Zambia's financial situation and the challenges that come with ensuring the quality of education. Since free education will remain a future goal, the government will have to look for diversified funding sources for free education, such as through public-private partnerships, international donors, and community funding to supplement the educational ministries. Furthermore, some of the challenges encountered, such as opting for information communication technologies to support the learning of outgrown urban centres, could be addressed through policy innovation.

More so, the success of the free education policy will largely depend on how the government will embrace other features of the reforms. In addition, this approach would require structural changes that would improve the education sector's capacity and reliability. Such strategies include:

- Teacher training and staffing policies.
- Evaluation systems for tracking the performance of education systems.
- School-wide policies that influence the efficient utilisation of educational resources.

Therefore, by incorporating quality assurance into the free education experience, Zambia can devise ways of making education effective for every child by stressing the free aspect of the education experience.

In conclusion, since the free education policy aligns with Zambian and international development goals and potentially targets intended beneficiaries, its historical and structural constraints deserve similar considerations related to its applicability and efficiency in improving education standards in Zambia. To be successful, this policy will need to

increase access for learners whilst maintaining investments in educational quality and using a coherent framework that addresses scarcity of resources, high student-teacher ratios and poor structures. Namely, the idea of free education as a part of the 2022 education vision may bring solid changes to Zambia's educational system. However, to reach the predetermined goals, it is essential not only to open doors to education facilities but to work on the quality improvement on both quantitative and qualitative levels continuously.

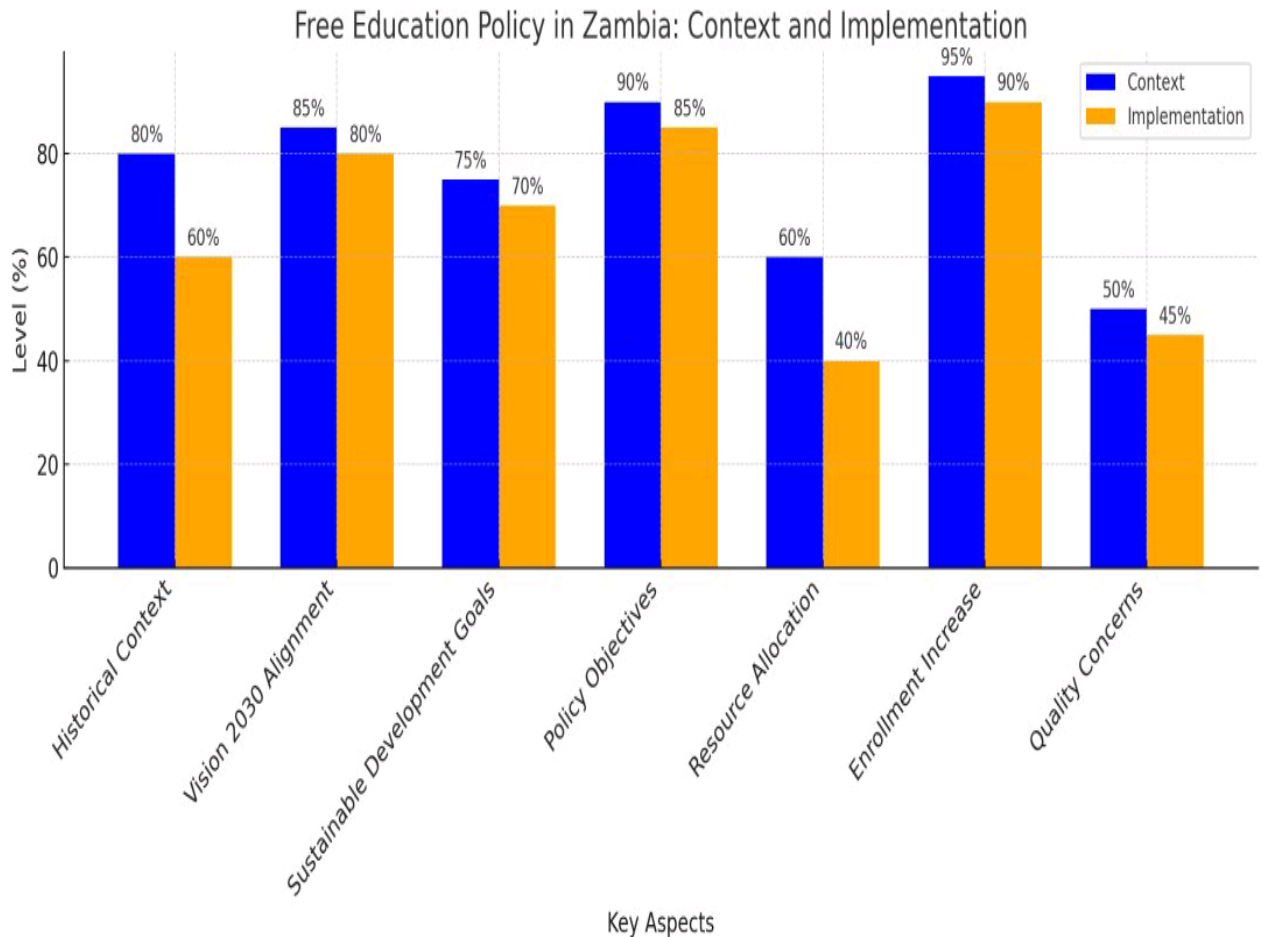


Figure 1. Context and Implementation" of Zambia's Free Education Policy

The graph above illustrates the "Context and Implementation" of Zambia's Free Education Policy across critical aspects:

Context (Blue Bars): It represents the historical setting, Z-VIS 2030, conforms to the principles of the SDGs, and aligns with the essential policy goals and objectives, asserting a strong foundation value.

Implementation (Orange Bars): This bar illustrates the actual level of implementation on these aspects. It demonstrates that high implementation on enrollment boosts aspects, while lesser success is achieved in areas such as resource management and quality issues.

Impact of Free Education on Access and Enrollment in Zambia

Surveying the literature, it becomes clear that Zambia's free education policy has seen a dramatic enrolment boost from lower classes across the country and all urban regions, partly in the Lusaka District. Findings, based on enrollment data, confirm that low-income families have been more effective in sending children to schools in increased numbers than in the past. Also, low-income families have closed the gender gap and provided schooling to even the most vulnerable groups.

Nevertheless, evidence from other countries shows that more access to learning does not necessarily result in a better learning environment. For example, while Ghana made its education accessible, the study revealed that poor resource input to schools deterred students' performance improvement (Duflo et al., 2015). The same observations are made in Zambia, where a sharp growth in learners' enrolment rates means that school spaces and teachers are overfilled, especially in zones like Lusaka.

Challenges to Educational Quality in the Context of Free Education

A central issue linked to the delivery of free education policies in other parts of the world, and is now evident in Zambia, is the issue of how to sustain quality education in the face of rapidly rising enrolment. Prior research on educational quality has identified relevant modifiers, including teacher quality, teachers per class, school facilities and students' resources (Glewwe & Kremer, 2006). The situation in Lusaka District schools is alarming in that classroom accommodation has reached its highest level, and teachers are thrown into enormous classes. They can also harm instructional quality, diminish students' engagement, and occasionally produce academic consequences. Also, the sector has a limited education budget, and the government of Zambia has not been able to recruit more teachers and upgrade facilities (World Bank, 2022).

Balancing Access and Quality: Policy Implications

When implemented, free education should achieve universal enrollment goals alongside quality to avoid ramifications like increased enrollment but without adequate support. Research evidence on policy enactment for education in Uganda and Tanzania shows the general need for teacher education, curriculum and production of school infrastructure for the governments to nurture and sustain education quality initiatives (Cameron, 2011). The current government reports of Zambia show that more funding is required, with more focus on the urban areas, especially Lusaka Province, alongside the management of the distribution of educational inputs (Ministry of General Education, 2023). As Zambia's Free Education Policy develops, it is crucial to identify such challenges and find evidence-based success factors to maximize a broad sectoral change.

As this review of literature shows, free education policies have expanded access to schooling while the effects on the quality of education vary. This case of Zambia, especially Lusaka District, clearly illustrates the trade-off and the problems accompanying justified access without the corresponding increase in facilities. To fully realize the potential of the free education policy, Zambia will require policies in other areas of education that are equally complimentary to the quality of education, such as recruiting teachers, resources, and development of facilities. From these ideas, this research focuses on Lusaka District as the case study to shed light on how the operationalization of free education policy in Zambia is transforming education positively and posing challenges.

2. Methodology

This paper employs qualitative research methodology, particularly document analysis, to study the implementation and effects of the Free Education Policy in Zambia for the Lusaka District. Because of the reliance on secondary data sources, this methodological approach helps researchers build a comprehensive contextual picture of how this Policy affected educational access and quality. The study provides a multicohort approach to analyzing the Policy through an objective use of documents that include policy documents, government reports, ministry databases, previous studies, academic journals, newspapers, and NGO evaluations.

This work takes comfort in the rich analysis of archival research and documentation to give much insight into changes in educational Policy in the Lusaka District. This is because the previous enrollment records, other past educational changes, records on budgets, and implementation policies allow the researchers to follow up with the progression of the Policy to meet even the national goals such as Vision 2030 and the sustainable development goals. To gather historical knowledge in regard to the implementation of Policy and its potential consequences, a critical review of the literature was conducted by employing both journal articles publications, case studies on similar policies of other African countries, and research papers that discuss barriers and future of access to education and quality of it, thus developing a systematic theoretical background for examination of the Policy.

Thus, the research approach builds on previously conducted qualitative research interviews with the interested stakeholders, published focus group results, and reported classroom observations. This systematic review of surveys and interviews uncovers subtle information about stakeholders' experiences, issues, and views on the policy decision. When researchers combine these sources of documented evidence, it is possible to establish patterns, prevalent themes and trends accentuating the impacts of the Free Education Policy across the various domains of the education system in the Lusaka District. This approach helps make sense of the documented challenges that include resource scarcity, infrastructure deficits, and depredations on educational quality that have appeared in past research and evaluation.

As a comprehensive qualitative method accompanied by secondary data analysis, the Policy can be described in detail and its impact may be revealed. By synthesizing findings from various documentary sources, the paper captures the anticipated and emergent outcomes of the Free Education Policy. This approach also makes a virtue out of the fact that historical context and documented experiences are being used while also expressing the acknowledged weaknesses inherent in the secondary source approach. The study explains the impact of the Policy on educational access and quality in the Lusaka District, which will help policymakers and educators improve academic achievement in urban Zambian settings. Since the study is situated in a qualitative secondary analysis methodology, it helps lay the groundwork for examining the Policy up to the current implementation level. Future primary research helps gather more insight into particular segments or aspects of the Policy.

3. Discussion

The effects of Zambia's Free Education Policy on access and quality of education, especially in the Lusaka District, cannot be measured in a simple nutshell; therefore, they require analysis. Launched to improve access and rates of enrolment in primary and secondary schools equally across the country, the policy, which promises education without fees to students, was implemented to promote equal opportunities. Also, its efficiency has been controversial, primarily concerning both the education attainment and the quality of education embraced by learners.

Access to Education:

Notably, on the positive aspect, the Free Education Policy has enhanced the proportion of educational access in the Lusaka District. The enrollment rates have grown with children from poor backgrounds or low-income earners who used to be locked out due to fee charges. This led to an increase in enrollment levels, meaning that more children attend school after they are out. Schools have expanded to accommodate more students, and the data provides testimony to the fact that the policies have worked as intended.

Further, enrollment rates have increased over the past few years, although there are challenges like overcrowding in existing classrooms. The number of students enrolled is on the rise, and therefore, it becomes challenging to handle large groups of students due to the increased teacher-student ratio. This frequently leads to pressing the existing resources, including textbooks, teaching aids, and other physical facilities, which may hardly be in proportion with the increasing numbers.

Quality of Education:

Though there has been significant progress in access to education, the question of the quality of education has also raised many concerns. However, several courses have been raised, one of which needs more funds attributed to the policy to cater to the needs of many students more than before because of the Free Education Policy. Teachers in this system are victims of work overload and may be unable to accord the necessary attention to the students, especially in large groups. Further, due to inadequate funding, the policy has been realised negatively in terms of acquiring educational materials, constructing school structures, and hiring qualified teachers.

In Lusaka District, some of these challenges have been compounded by increased student enrollment. Most schools need help maintaining. Besides, the curriculum and activities were only sometimes amended to meet the modern dimensions, such as the increased student enrollment capacity and they needed education of the growing population.

Another factor is the trainers' efficiency, where most trainers need more qualifying education or adequate provisions to teach in overlarge and meagre-funded classes. The Free Education Policy has not solved many problems because it did not target problem areas in Zambia's education sector, including a difference between urban and rural education standards or even when comparing the quality of education between Lusaka and the remote regions.

Policy Adjustments and Recommendations:

Some recommendations could increase the performance of the Free Education Policy in Lusaka: First, more funding will be essential to meet its demands. This would include allocating more money for school construction and development, purchasing textbooks and other teaching aids, and hiring teachers. Moreover, better classroom quality could be achieved by developing specific policies and increasing teacher training and professional development. Second, the government should pay attention to decentralized resource management so schools in different provinces, especially Lusaka, can afford the necessary funds to address overcrowding. This would help manage overcrowding cases and ensure that the institution did not offer quality education.

Lastly, there is an imperative call to develop an overall concept in terms of monitoring and evaluating the Free Education Policy, mainly a mix of uni and multivariate methods regarding the implementation gap on equity and quality issues. For the policy to achieve the intended objectives, changes in the implementation strategy and the involvement of the involvement of all stakeholders, including educators, parents, and leaders at Lusaka schools, should be observed.

Therefore, despite the gains made so far, where the Free Education Policy has led to increased access to education, especially at the basic level in the Lusaka District, there is a need to purposefully address issues related to quality in various schools. All these will require additional investment, better organizational and resource management, and strategic effort to make quality education accessible to every learner.

4. Results

Impact of Zambia's Free Education Policy on Access and Quality of Education (Lusaka District)

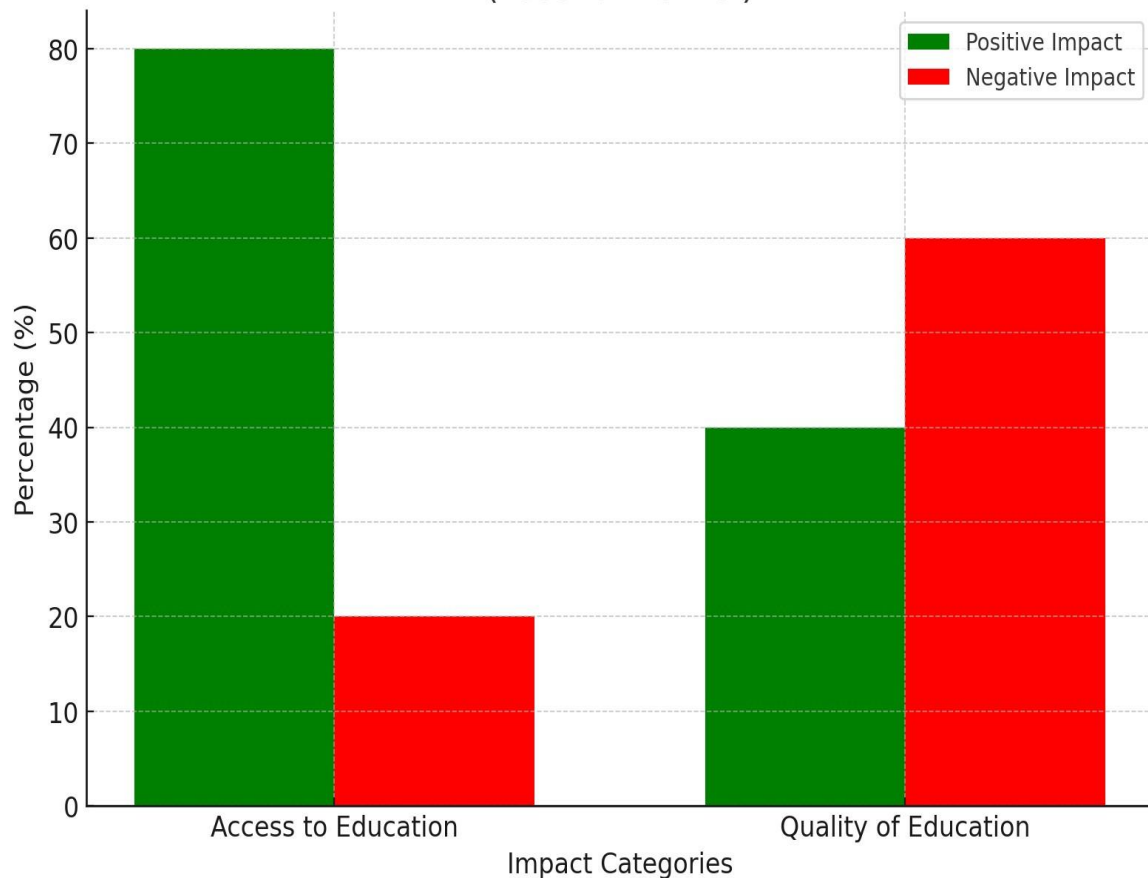


Figure 2. The evaluation of Zambia's Free Education Policy on access and quality of education in the Lusaka District

The graph above represents the evaluation of Zambia's Free Education Policy on access and quality of education in the Lusaka District. It reveals the distribution of positive and negative effects in a particular area. Positive impact corresponds to the green bars, whilst negative impact corresponds to the red bars. As observed, the policy has positively impacted the likelihood of education expansion; however, the quality of education remained a challenge, with far more percentages in the negative zone.

5. Conclusion

This paper assesses the impact and effect of Zambia's Free Education Policy, especially in the Lusaka District, with both the benefits and difficulties the implementation offers. In this regard, it is beyond doubt that the policy has positively impacted access to education since the enrollment level has been enhanced significantly among the most vulnerable groups. Since direct costs on education have been removed from schools, the policy has hired a giant ladder to facilitate access to education and ensure that many children, especially those from low-income families, attend school.

Despite the progress of free education, this quality needs to be improved. Though enrollment rights have been enhanced, the challenges have remained: congested classrooms, scarce teaching aids, and a shortened supply of competent teachers. Policy needs

to be followed by the necessary investment ever-growing number growing as required. This can mean that students need more academic quality education to meet their educational needs.

Furthermore, the policy has yet to be equally rolled out to all the schools in the Lusaka District, as urban schools have registered better results than rural ones. This disparity clearly indicates why schools in underprivileged areas require special attention through a well-fashioned program to address their problems.

Therefore, though the Free Education Policy in Zambia has contributed positively to the realization of education, enhanced provision of quality education requires more investment in teachers, schools, and books. One of the future improvements is to strike a good balance between providing FP and keeping it of reasonably high quality, which will be central to the policy's future evolution.

Recommendation

Based on the evaluation of Zambia's Free Education Policy in Lusaka District, the following recommendations are proposed to the government to improve both access and quality of education:

1. **Increase Funding for Education:** The government should increase its expenditure on education, especially to bear the increasing cost of the construction of schools plus other, education requirements such as the provision of learning facilities and teachers' remuneration. More funding should go on constructing more classrooms, procuring relevant learning materials and fixing up the infrastructural deterioration faced by schools in general as well as both the urban and rural regions.
2. **Invest in Teacher Recruitment and Retention:** The government should, therefore, increase its efforts in employing competent teachers, particularly in respective hard-to-staff areas. Besides, it should establish a long-term approach toward teacher retention, and offer bonuses, long-term professional development plans and other tools that would help to retain innovative educators in the future.
3. **Strengthen Teacher Training Programs:** In view of this, the government should introduce and raise standards of training institutions to adequately equip teachers to handle the increased number of students enrolling in classrooms. These must cover pre-service and in-service training that impacts professional development, teaching, management, and student disparity.
4. **Improve Distribution of Learning Resources:** The government should ensure that textbooks, learning resources, and other teaching aids are well supplied in schools, especially those in rural and peri-urban areas. An effective distribution mechanism must be developed to ensure equal accessibility to students' support equipment.
5. **Expand and Upgrade Educational Infrastructure:** To respond to the increasing number of learners, the government should consider building more classrooms to accommodate all students. This entails putting up new classrooms, expanding laboratories, and enhancing the physical school structures to achieve the capacity to contain the expanding student enrollment.
6. **Monitor and Address Regional Disparities:** The adoption of relevant measures that would help to level the differences in the quality of schooling in urban and rural areas; this, in turn, presupposes the initiation of specific targeted programmes by the government. This may involve more resources for schools located in needy areas, providing transport to students in distant regions, and enhanced access to technology among teacher trainers and students.

7. Strengthen Policy Implementation and Oversight: The government should enhance the policies' shortcomings to support the Free Education Policy, especially in the monitoring and evaluation processes. District and national performance of the policy should be periodically evaluated to discover areas of need for policy adjustment or alteration and problems that have not been foreseen and to strengthen the policy's check and balance in the utilization of resources.

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