

UNIVERSITY
OF
LUSAKA

SCHOOL OF TECHNOLOGY AND SOCIAL SCIENCES

**“Analysing Policy Implementation: A Case Study of the Free Education Policy in
Selected Public Primary Schools in Lusaka District.”**

A RESERCH REPORT

**Presented to the Faculty of the School of Technology and Social Sciences in partial
Fulfilment of the Requirements for the Degree of Bachelor of Science in Public
Administration.**

Mwelwa Safeli

BPA22114920

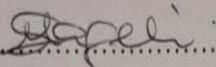
2025

9th February 2026


DECLARATION

“Analysing Policy Implementation: A case study of the Free Education Policy in
selected Public Primary Schools in Lusaka District.”

I Mwelwa Safeli declare that this dissertation is my own work, and all sources have been
acknowledged.

Signature:..........

Date: 09/02/2026

Supervisors Signature:.....

.....
Date: 09/02/2026

Dedication

This dissertation is lovingly dedicated to the cherished memory of my beloved parents, **Nellie Ndubeko Zulu** and **Eric Lwanga Safeli**. This achievement reflects the dreams they held for me and the values they instilled in me such as perseverance, integrity, and the pursuit of excellence. Their unwavering love, encouragement, and belief in my potential continue to guide and inspire me. May this work honour their legacy.

Acknowledgements

I am deeply grateful to God Almighty for His guidance, strength, and grace throughout my period of study. This achievement would not have been possible without His continued presence.

My heartfelt appreciation goes to my husband, Jacob Musukwa, for his unwavering moral and financial support. To my children, Luisa and Lewis Musukwa, thank you for your patience, understanding, and constant encouragement as I balanced school, work, church and family responsibilities.

I am equally thankful to my friends, course mates, and family, whose belief in me often surpassed my own. Your encouragement kept me moving forward even during the most challenging moments.

To my MOE DODE family, thank you for your understanding and support, especially during residential school sessions, your kindness did not go unnoticed.

I would also like to thank my Supervisor, Mr. Lloyd Nsingo, for his timely guidance, constructive criticisms and mentorship to help with this research process. I am also grateful to the entire teaching staff for their invaluable scholarly knowledge and experience. Through you all, the effort has been truly worthwhile. I remain profoundly grateful.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Dedication	i
Acknowledgements	ii
Table of Contents.....	iii
Abstract	v
CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION	
1.1 Introduction and overview.....	1
1.2 Background of the Study	2
1.3 Problem Statement	3
1.4 Objectives of the Study	5
1.5 Research Questions.....	5
1.6 Significance of the Study	6
1.7 Scope of the Study	7
CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW	
2.1 Introduction	8
2.2 Response of Schools to the Free Education Policy.....	8
2.3 Successes of the Free Education Policy.....	12
2.4 Challenges Faced by Schools in Policy Execution	17
2.5 Literature Gap	17
2.6 Theoretical Framework	18
2.7 Conceptual Framework.....	19
CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY	
3.1 Introduction	22
3.2 Research Approach.....	22
3.3 Research design	22
3.4 Study Area.....	24
3.5 Target Population.....	24
3.6 Sampling Design and Sample Size.....	25
3.7 Data Collection Methods.....	25
3.8 Data Analysis.....	25

CHAPTER FOUR: RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.0 Presentation of findings28
4.2 School Responses 29
4.3 Successes of the Policy 29
4.4 Challenges of Implementation33
4.5 Discussion of Findings.....36
4.6 Conclusion.....38

CHAPTER FIVE: SUMMARY, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Summary of Findings 39
5.2 Conclusion41
5.2 Recommendations 41

References43
Appendices44

Abstract

The Free Education Policy was introduced by the Government of Zambia to improve access to education and promote equity by removing user fees in public primary schools. This study examined the implementation of the Free Education Policy in selected public primary schools in Lusaka District, with the aim of understanding school responses to the policy, identifying successes, and exploring challenges encountered during implementation at school level. The study adopted a qualitative case study design. The target population comprised head teachers, teachers, and Parent Teacher Association (PTA) representatives from selected public primary schools. A purposive sampling technique was used to select participants who were directly involved in the implementation of the policy. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews and analysed thematically in line with the study objectives.

The findings revealed that public primary schools responded positively to the Free Education Policy by admitting all eligible learners, removing user fees, engaging communities, adjusting teaching schedules, and adopting coping strategies such as splitting classes and rotating learners. Key successes recorded included increased enrolment, improved access for vulnerable learners, reduced school dropouts, positive community perception of government commitment to education, and the ability of schools to focus on teaching rather than fee collection. However, the study also established several challenges, including overcrowded classrooms, high teacher–pupil ratios, inadequate teaching and learning materials, strained sanitation facilities, insufficient funding through school grants, and limited administrative support and monitoring from education authorities. Based on the findings, the study recommends increased funding of primary school grants, recruitment of additional teachers, expansion of school infrastructure, consistent provision of teaching and learning materials, strengthened monitoring and support by the Ministry of Education, and enhanced community engagement. The study recommends that while the Free Education Policy has significantly improved access to education, its sustainability and effectiveness depend on adequate resourcing, strong administrative support, and effective coordination between policymakers and frontline implementers.

Chapter 1

1.1 Introduction and Overview

Public policy implementation is a critical stage in the policy process, as it determines whether well-intended policies translate into tangible social outcomes. While policy formulation often receives significant attention, implementation is where policies are tested in real-world contexts, shaped by institutional capacity, administrative structures, resource availability, and the actions of frontline implementers. Scholars of public administration emphasize that implementation is not a mechanical process but a complex interaction between government institutions, service providers, and beneficiaries. In many developing countries, gaps frequently emerge between policy intentions and actual practice due to bureaucratic constraints, coordination challenges, and limited resources.

Education policy, in particular, illustrates these implementation dynamics clearly because it involves multiple actors, decentralized delivery systems, and diverse local contexts. Even when national governments commit to progressive reforms, the success of such policies ultimately depends on how effectively schools, teachers, administrators, and communities operationalize them on the ground. This makes the study of policy implementation in education both necessary and valuable for understanding why some reforms succeed while others struggle.

In Zambia, access to education has long been recognized as a national priority and a foundation for socio-economic development (UNESCO, 2021). In line with this commitment, the Government of the Republic of Zambia reintroduced the Free Education Policy (FEP) in 2022, abolishing tuition and user fees in public primary and secondary schools (Ministry of Education, 2022). The policy sought to remove financial barriers to basic education and promote equity, particularly for children from low-income and marginalized households. This marked a significant milestone in Zambia's efforts toward achieving Sustainable Development Goal 4, which emphasizes inclusive and quality education for all.

Since its introduction, the Free Education Policy has led to notable increases in school enrolment, demonstrating its effectiveness in expanding access. However, this rapid growth has also placed considerable pressure on schools, exposing challenges related to classroom overcrowding, teacher workload, infrastructure shortages, and administrative capacity. These issues highlight the

importance of examining not only the policy itself but also the processes through which it is implemented at the school level.

From a public administration perspective, the Free Education Policy provides a compelling case for analyzing how national policies are translated into local practice. It raises critical questions about institutional coordination, resource allocation, frontline decision-making, and the capacity of school-level actors to manage change.

This study therefore analyses the implementation of the Free Education Policy in selected public primary schools in Lusaka District, focusing on how schools have responded to the policy, the successes achieved, and the challenges encountered during execution. By adopting a qualitative case study approach, the research provides localized, school-level insights into the dynamics of policy implementation, contributing to both academic knowledge and practical policy improvement.

1.2 Background of the Study

Public policy implementation is widely recognised as one of the most critical and complex stages of the policy process. While governments may formulate well-intentioned policies, their success ultimately depends on how effectively they are implemented at the local level. In many developing countries, including Zambia, policy implementation is often constrained by limited financial resources, institutional capacity challenges, and variations in administrative effectiveness across regions and sectors. Consequently, examining how policies function in practice is as important as analysing their design.

In the education sector, implementation challenges are particularly significant because schools serve as frontline institutions responsible for translating national policies into practical outcomes for learners. Zambia has long prioritised education as a key driver of national development, social equity, and poverty reduction. In line with Sustainable Development Goal 4, which emphasises inclusive and equitable quality education for all, the Zambian government introduced the Free Education Policy in 2022. This policy abolished user fees in public primary schools with the aim of removing financial barriers to education, increasing enrolment, and ensuring that vulnerable and low-income learners have access to schooling.

Since its introduction, the Free Education Policy has resulted in a significant increase in enrolment in public primary schools, particularly in urban districts such as Lusaka. However, this expansion in access has placed considerable pressure on existing school resources, including classrooms, teaching staff, learning materials, and sanitation facilities. These challenges raise important questions about the effectiveness and sustainability of the policy's implementation at school level.

This study therefore analyses public policy implementation through a case study of the Free Education Policy in selected public primary schools in Lusaka District, focusing on how schools have responded to the policy, the successes recorded, and the challenges encountered in its execution.

1.3 Statement of the Problem

Public policy implementation remains a major challenge in many developing countries, as policies often fail to achieve their intended outcomes due to resource constraints, weak institutional capacity, and limited administrative support. In Zambia, the education sector has experienced similar challenges, where policy intentions have not always been matched with adequate implementation capacity at the school level.

The Free Education Policy introduced in 2022 was a landmark reform aimed at promoting equitable access to education by eliminating user fees in public primary schools. While the policy has successfully increased enrolment and reduced financial barriers for parents, its implementation has been accompanied by significant challenges, including overcrowded classrooms, teacher shortages, inadequate infrastructure, and insufficient teaching and learning materials. These constraints have raised concerns about the quality of education and the sustainability of the policy's gains.

Despite the growing public and academic interest in free education, there is limited empirical research that examines how the policy is implemented in practice within Zambian schools from a public administration and policy implementation perspective. This study therefore seeks to analyse how selected public primary schools in Lusaka District have implemented the Free Education Policy, the successes they have recorded, and the challenges they face in policy execution, in order to inform policy improvement and strengthen implementation capacity.

Although the Free Education Policy has led to increased enrolment in public primary schools, its implementation has also exposed several challenges that question its long-term sustainability and effectiveness (Moonga & Mufune, 2022; Sitali & Chikopela, 2022). Reports indicate that public schools are struggling with overcrowded classrooms, insufficient teaching staff, limited infrastructure, and inadequate funding to match the surge in learners (Mulenga, 2021; Chileshe, 2023). Existing literature has primarily focused on access and enrollment, yet there is limited empirical research on how schools are coping with policy demands at the implementation level (Ngoma & Kalimaposo, 2022; Kambole & Mphuka, 2021).

Most previous studies have examined Zambia's education policy from a national or statistical perspective, relying on enrolment data and broad policy reviews (UNESCO, 2021; World Bank, 2022). While useful, such studies often overlook localised administrative dynamics and the lived experiences of school-level actors who directly implement the policy. Moreover, much of the existing literature concentrates on learning outcomes and infrastructure rather than the public administration processes that translate policy into practice.

This study addresses this gap by examining the lived realities of school administrators, teachers, parents, and learners in selected public primary schools in Lusaka District, while assessing how public administration systems shape successes and challenges in policy implementation (Kasonde, 2021). Unlike earlier studies, this research employs a case study design, qualitative interviews, and a multi-stakeholder perspective, making it one of the first studies to provide localised, administration-focused evidence on the Free Education Policy. In doing so, the research contributes new insights into the policy-practice gap and offers a context-specific analysis that can inform future policy adjustments (UNESCO, 2021; World Bank, 2022).

1.4 Research Objectives

General Objective:

To analyse the implementation of the Free Education Policy in selected Public Primary schools in Lusaka District.

Specific Objectives:

1. To examine how selected public primary schools in Lusaka District have responded to the implementation of the Free Education Policy.
2. To identify and analyse the key successes recorded since the implementation of the Free Education Policy in selected public primary schools.
3. To explore and critically assess the challenges encountered by school administrators and teachers in implementing the Free Education Policy.

1.5 Research Questions

1. How have public primary schools responded to the implementation of the Free Education Policy at the selected public schools in Lusaka District?
2. What successes have been recorded since the implementation of the policy at the selected public schools in Lusaka District??
3. What are the key challenges encountered during policy implementation at the selected public schools in Lusaka District?

1.6 Significance of the Study

This study is significant for the following reasons:

- 1. Policy Relevance:** It provides empirical evidence to policymakers and the Ministry of Education on the implementation progress and challenges of the Free Education Policy, helping to shape more responsive and sustainable education strategies.
- 2. Academic Contribution:** It fills a gap in literature by focusing on the implementation dynamics of the Free Education Policy at the school level, contributing to research on education policy, governance, and public administration in Zambia.
- 3. Operational Insights:** The study offers practical insights for school managers, education officers, and NGOs on best practices and areas requiring support.
- 4. Community Benefit:** Improved implementation of the policy may ultimately lead to better learning outcomes and more equitable access to quality education for learners.

1.7 Scope of the Study

1. Geographical Scope: The research is conducted in Lusaka District, focusing on selected public primary schools.

2. Thematic Scope: Focuses on policy implementation, administrative capacity, resource challenges, and quality outcomes in relation to the Free Education Policy.

3. Institutional Scope: Includes selected public primary schools.

4. Time Scope: Covers the period from the introduction of the Free Education Policy in 2022 up to 2024.

1.7.1 Operational Definition

1. Free Education Policy: A government initiative introduced in Zambia in 2022 to eliminate tuition and user fees for learners in public primary and secondary schools, aiming to improve access to education.

2. Implementation: The process by which education policies, such as free education, are put into practice through planning, coordination, and execution by government institutions and schools.

3. Public Primary Schools: Government-funded institutions offering education from Grade 1 to Grade 7, under the administration of the Ministry of Education and Lusaka District Education Board.

4. Access to Education: The extent to which learners are able to enroll and attend school regardless of socio-economic status, influenced by factors like proximity, affordability, and policy inclusion.

5. Educational Resources: Teaching and learning materials such as textbooks, desks, classrooms, and teacher availability necessary for effective delivery of education services.

6. Administrative Capacity: The ability of education institutions and managers to plan, allocate, and manage resources effectively, and monitor the delivery of the Free Education Policy.

7. Education Stakeholders: Individuals and organizations involved in education delivery and policy, including school administrators, teachers and PTAs,

8. Quality Education: A form of education that ensures learning outcomes such as literacy, numeracy, and critical thinking skills, delivered in a supportive and well-resourced environment.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

This chapter reviews relevant literature on public policy implementation and education policy reforms, with particular emphasis on free education policies in different contexts. The review is structured from the general to the specific: first, it examines public policy implementation in developing countries; second, it explores global experiences with free education policies; third, it considers regional and Zambian perspectives; and finally, it links the literature to the theoretical framework guiding this study. This structure aligns with the study's aim of analysing public policy implementation through the case of Zambia's Free Education Policy. The review provides the academic grounding for the study and identifies gaps that this research aims to address.

The review adopts a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) approach, which allows for a structured and transparent method of identifying, evaluating, and synthesizing relevant research (Tranfield et al., 2003). The SLR approach is particularly appropriate for this study because it integrates evidence from both theoretical and empirical sources, enabling a more nuanced understanding of how education policies such as the Free Education Policy are implemented within diverse administrative contexts (Xiao & Watson, 2019).

2.2 Response of Schools to the Free Education Policy

Globally, the introduction of free education policies has prompted immediate and sometimes overwhelming institutional responses from schools, highlighting both enthusiasm for access and tension around capacity. UNESCO (2021) notes that the removal of school fees often leads to sharp enrolment surges, forcing schools to reorganize timetables, redistribute teachers, and expand classroom spaces to absorb the increased numbers. Such transformations, while expanding inclusion, tend to stretch the limits of existing administrative systems. Many developed countries have long established traditions of free education, yet their experiences continue to offer valuable insights into how schools respond to the policy shift toward universal access. In Germany, for

instance, public schools responded to free education policies by maintaining a strong emphasis on vocational pathways and equitable access across regions. The dual system where schools work closely with industries reflects a well-coordinated administrative structure that ensures smooth policy implementation (Witte & Kalleberg, 2018). Similarly, in Norway, the removal of financial barriers to education was accompanied by deliberate decentralization, granting municipalities the autonomy to adapt implementation strategies based on local needs (Telhaug, Mediås, & Aasen, 2006). This flexibility enabled schools to respond dynamically to enrolment patterns and demographic changes without compromising quality.

Finland provides perhaps the most well-documented case of adaptive response to free education. When education was made free and compulsory, Finnish schools invested heavily in teacher training and professional autonomy, enabling institutions to maintain both access and quality (Sahlberg, 2011). Teachers were trusted as key decision-makers, and schools were encouraged to innovate within a framework of equity and inclusion. In contrast, France faced early administrative pressures when it expanded free schooling nationwide. Public schools initially struggled with teacher shortages and infrastructural disparities, particularly in rural areas. However, France's centralized education system allowed for a coordinated national response, including accelerated teacher recruitment and infrastructural investment (Prost, 2004).

In Sweden, schools embraced free education as an opportunity for pedagogical renewal. The introduction of free comprehensive education led schools to redesign learning environments and integrate inclusive teaching practices (Lundahl, 2016). Similarly, Denmark's education system emphasized community participation through school boards, which strengthened accountability and improved resource utilization (OECD, 2015). In Argentina, schools responded to the expansion of free education with mixed outcomes: while access improved substantially, schools in poorer provinces experienced overcrowding and shortages of qualified teachers (Narodowski & Moschetti, 2015). Similarly, Nepal's experience with fee abolition revealed that without adequate planning, schools were forced to use makeshift community halls and temporary structures to host learners (Bhatta, 2011).

These examples collectively show that even in countries with advanced administrative capacities, school responses depend on systemic coherence, decentralization, and professional support structures.

These global experiences reveal an important pattern: the success of free education reforms depends not merely on removing financial barriers but on how schools adapt structurally and managerially to the policy. This underscores the notion that implementation is an administrative process as much as it is a policy decision.

Across Africa, the introduction of free education policies has elicited diverse responses from schools, shaped largely by institutional capacity, administrative preparedness, and community engagement. In Rwanda, the launch of the Nine-Year Basic Education (9YBE) programme in 2006 led to an immediate surge in enrolments, particularly in rural districts. Schools responded by implementing double-shift systems and community classroom construction initiatives to accommodate the influx of learners (Mukama & Andersson, 2018). Teachers demonstrated adaptability despite resource shortages, while local leaders mobilized parental and community support to sustain the policy's momentum.

Uganda's experience following the Universal Primary Education (UPE) policy of 1997 offers similar insights. The abolition of school fees resulted in a dramatic enrolment increase from 2.5 million to over 7 million pupils within a few years (Nishimura, Yamano, & Sasaoka, 2008). Schools responded by recruiting untrained teachers and utilizing temporary classrooms, reflecting both enthusiasm and strain within the system. Mozambique, after implementing its fee-free education policy in the early 2000s, saw schools adjusting to large class sizes by adopting multi-grade teaching and peer learning systems (Jones, 2006). These coping mechanisms illustrate a grassroots-level determination to uphold access despite infrastructural limitations.

In Togo and Benin, schools' responses to fee abolition were shaped by historical legacies of underfunding. Togo's schools relied heavily on parent-teacher associations (PTAs) and local committees to sustain operations, while Benin's schools embraced community-based management to maintain accountability (DeStefano & Hartwell, 2020). Sierra Leone's schools, following the Free Quality School Education (FQSE) initiative in 2018, responded positively through

community participation and partnerships with non-governmental organizations. However, rapid expansion also exposed weaknesses in monitoring and school-level administration (World Bank, 2020).

Makhubele (2019) shows that in South Africa, school management committees and parental involvement played a critical role in stabilizing schools after the abolition of fees, suggesting that strong local governance can cushion systemic shocks. By contrast, Kenya's Free Primary Education (FPE) program relied on improvisation such as multi-grade teaching, sharing limited materials, and teacher reassignments to maintain learning continuity (Oketch, 2008). In Uganda, where Universal Primary Education (UPE) was introduced earlier, administrators adopted a hybrid model combining government direction with community volunteerism to manage shortages (Deininger, 2003). In Ghana schools introduced flexible promotion policies to accommodate diverse learning paces after enrolment surged (Osei, 2006). Meanwhile in Ethiopia, the rapid increase in learners led to the recruitment of contract teachers and temporary classrooms. In Tanzania, the 2016 rollout of fee-free education triggered massive enrolment gains but left many schools grappling with overcrowding and resource shortages, compelling administrators to implement double-shift systems (World Bank, 2018).

Taken together, these African cases reflect a shared reality: while the removal of fees improves access, the administrative burden often shifts downward from the state to school management. Thus, free education policies test not only government commitment but also the resilience and creativity of local administrators. Overall, these responses show that African schools often meet free education reforms with creativity and resilience, though success heavily depends on administrative capacity and local support mechanisms.

Within Zambia, these broader lessons resonate strongly. Banda (2020) observes that schools in Lusaka responded to the Free Education Policy by expanding class sizes and reassigning teaching spaces. Interviews from urban schools reveal that staffrooms, libraries, and even corridors were converted into classrooms. Teachers adopted split-shift teaching to accommodate the new learners, while headteachers adjusted timetables to avoid complete instructional breakdowns. Such responses illustrate a high degree of institutional flexibility, yet they also point to an education system under strain. As with other countries, Zambia's experience demonstrates that while access

expands rapidly, the administrative and infrastructural foundations of schools are often unprepared to sustain the change.

2.3 Successes of the Free Education Policy

The removal of user fees has been globally recognized as one of the most effective equity-driven policies in basic education. Wang (2018) and UNESCO (2021) highlight how such policies have enabled millions of children particularly those from marginalized backgrounds to enroll in school.

In Sri Lanka, for example, sustained government investment in free education has translated into near-universal literacy, showing how equity-focused policies can have generational impact (Little, 2010). Similarly, Brazil's model, which integrates fee abolition with school feeding and social protection programs, demonstrates that financial accessibility works best when supported by broader welfare initiatives (Glewwe & Kassouf, 2012). The global success of free education policies is evident in the substantial progress toward inclusivity, equity, and literacy. Finland's education system, for instance, has consistently ranked among the best globally, largely because free education was paired with equity-driven reforms such as universal preschool, nutritious school meals, and individualized support for learners (Sahlberg, 2011). These measures ensured that removing financial barriers translated into real learning outcomes. Sweden similarly achieved significant success by promoting equal access and maintaining high learning standards across municipalities. The emphasis on local governance and professional trust among teachers created a culture of shared responsibility (Lundahl, 2016).

In Norway, free education contributed to the nation's social mobility and economic competitiveness, with education becoming a key pillar of the welfare state. Schools' ability to provide inclusive education for immigrant and rural populations reflects the policy's enduring success (Telhaug et al., 2006). Germany's experience also illustrates success through its dual-track system, which combines academic and vocational pathways, ensuring that free education leads directly to employability and lifelong learning opportunities (Witte & Kalleberg, 2018).

In France, the universalization of education reduced social inequalities over time, particularly in access to secondary and tertiary education. Similarly, Denmark's free education policy fostered strong public trust in government institutions and high levels of civic engagement (OECD, 2015).

Although Argentina experienced initial disparities, free education led to a marked increase in literacy rates and gender parity, especially among rural and low-income populations (Narodowski & Moschetti, 2015). Collectively, these successes demonstrate that when free education policies are accompanied by strategic investments in human capital, institutional support, and equity frameworks, they yield profound developmental gains.

These cases indicate that the success of free education lies not only in policy proclamation but in systemic reinforcement like training teachers, supplying materials, and decentralizing decision-making to empower schools.

Within Africa, comparable trends can be seen. Despite significant constraints, the successes achieved through free education policies in Africa are undeniable. Rwanda's programme stands out as one of the most effective in Sub-Saharan Africa, achieving near-universal primary enrolment and significant gender parity by the mid-2010s (World Bank, 2019). The country's success stems from strong government coordination, performance monitoring, and alignment between education and national development plans. Uganda's UPE policy, while initially criticized for quality declines, has contributed immensely to literacy gains and the narrowing of gender disparities in education (Deininger, 2003). The policy enabled millions of children from poor households to access education for the first time, fundamentally transforming Uganda's human capital landscape.

Mozambique also recorded major successes following the removal of fees, including a marked improvement in school attendance and reductions in dropout rates, especially among girls (Jones, 2006). The government's collaboration with international donors helped sustain these gains through continuous teacher recruitment and classroom construction. In Benin, the introduction of free education in 2006 led to an immediate and sustained rise in enrolment rates, particularly in rural and peri-urban areas (UNESCO, 2015). Togo's experience mirrors this trend: the abolition of school fees in 2008 was followed by a 12% increase in enrolment within a single academic year (DeStefano & Hartwell, 2020).

Sierra Leone's Free Quality School Education initiative has also recorded important milestones. Between 2018 and 2022, primary school enrolment increased by over one million, and the

government invested heavily in teacher salaries and textbooks (World Bank, 2020). These examples reveal that, across Africa, free education has substantially expanded access, enhanced gender equality, and deepened public trust in education systems. However, sustainability often depends on whether these access gains are matched with quality improvements and administrative readiness.

Olaniyan (2020) highlights Kenya's FPE as a notable achievement in gender equity, with female enrolment surpassing 50% for the first time in several rural counties. Uganda's UPE also succeeded in expanding access for historically excluded groups, though at the cost of quality pressures (Deininger, 2003). Ghana's introduction of the Capitation Grant Scheme further shows how targeted financing mechanisms can ensure that free education remains sustainable (Osei, 2006). In Rwanda, the Nine Year Basic Education (9YBE) reform succeeded in expanding access to lower secondary education, supported by performance based teacher management systems (Kagabo, 2019). These examples converge on a critical insight: free education works best when supported by deliberate funding models and clear administrative accountability.

Zambia's early results mirror these continental patterns. Chanda (2021) reports significant increases in primary school enrolment following the 2022 reintroduction of the Free Education Policy. According to the Ministry of Education (2022), schools across Lusaka District recorded enrolment spikes of up to 30%, accompanied by reduced dropout rates. Ministry statistics show that enrolments in Grade One rose by over 20% in Lusaka District within the first year of implementation (MoE, 2023). Reports also indicate increased participation from girls and children from low-income households, aligning with the equity goals of SDG 4.1. The Zambia National Education Coalition (2022) further notes that the policy has rekindled community participation and parent engagement in school governance. Yet, while these outcomes signify a social achievement, they also reveal the beginning of a new administrative challenge how to maintain quality amid growth. Thus, Zambia's success story remains one of expanding opportunity while navigating the complex trade-offs between access and quality.

2.4 Challenges Faced by Schools in Policy Execution

Despite the remarkable achievements in expanding access, the global literature consistently points to the implementation dilemma the difficulty of translating policy intent into sustainable outcomes. Hoadley (2020) identifies this as a universal challenge, noting that the administrative systems of most developing countries are ill-prepared to absorb the surge in enrolment that follows fee abolition. For instance, in India, the Right to Education Act (2010) mandated universal access but led to teacher overload, infrastructural stress, and management inefficiency (Kingdon, 2017). Likewise, in Bangladesh, free education programs outpaced the supply of trained teachers, resulting in lower instructional quality (Asadullah & Chaudhury, 2013). Despite their successes, these countries have also faced challenges in policy execution, for instance France and Argentina both encountered difficulties managing overcrowded classrooms and teacher shortages immediately after policy implementation (Prost, 2004; Narodowski & Moschetti, 2015). The administrative strain in Argentina, particularly in underfunded provinces, highlighted the risk of inequitable resource distribution even under a national policy framework. Germany faced challenges in harmonizing educational standards across federal states, where decentralization sometimes led to disparities in resource allocation and curriculum design (Witte & Kalleberg, 2018).

In Sweden and Finland, maintaining educational quality amid rising diversity became a central concern. As immigration increased, schools had to develop new pedagogical approaches to ensure inclusivity while preserving excellence (Lundahl, 2016; Sahlberg, 2011). Similarly, Denmark grappled with balancing autonomy and accountability. While local management improved responsiveness, it also created uneven implementation outcomes across municipalities (OECD, 2015). Norway faced the challenge of maintaining equity across its geographically vast and sparsely populated regions, where rural schools often struggled with teacher retention and limited infrastructure (Telhaug et al., 2006). These cases underscore that free education, while socially transformative, must continually evolve to address issues of equity, capacity, and sustainability.

These examples highlight that the administrative side of education reform such as resource coordination, staffing, and supervision is as crucial as the policy announcement itself.

Across Africa, these administrative bottlenecks manifest in similar but context-specific ways. While access improved dramatically, the implementation of free education policies in these African countries was accompanied by a host of challenges. In Uganda, the UPE policy's rapid expansion strained existing school infrastructure and led to overcrowded classrooms, teacher shortages, and declining learning outcomes (Nishimura et al., 2008). Weak supervision mechanisms further complicated accountability. Rwanda faced similar pressures: though access was achieved, quality became a pressing concern as schools struggled with limited instructional materials and overworked teachers (Mukama & Andersson, 2018).

In Mozambique, financial and administrative constraints hampered the policy's effectiveness, with schools depending heavily on external funding to meet operational costs (Jones, 2006). Benin and Togo both experienced administrative fragmentation due to unclear delineation of responsibilities between local authorities and central ministries (UNESCO, 2015). The reliance on community contributions to fill funding gaps occasionally undermined the very notion of "free" education. Sierra Leone, emerging from a post-conflict context, struggled with teacher absenteeism, inadequate data systems, and uneven distribution of learning materials (World Bank, 2020).

Mugo (2019) observes that in Kenya and Tanzania, free education policies quickly led to overcrowding, strained resources, and deteriorating learning environments. URT (2016) further reports that in Tanzania, textbook shortages became acute, and teacher morale declined as workloads grew unsustainably. These experiences reveal the risk of policy overreach when reforms are not matched with resource expansion. These challenges highlight a consistent pattern across Africa: the success of free education policies depends not merely on abolishing fees but on ensuring that schools are equipped to handle the resulting systemic expansion

In Zambia, the challenge is equally pronounced. Mwansa (2021) and ZANEC (2022) note that teachers face overwhelming class sizes, often exceeding 70 pupils per class, while teaching materials remain inadequate. Delays in communication between the District Education Board Secretaries (DEBS) and school administrators have created inconsistencies in policy interpretation and resource allocation. Teachers express frustration over insufficient support and limited pedagogical training to handle larger classes. These realities suggest that while Zambia has

succeeded in broadening access, it has yet to achieve the administrative maturity required for effective, equitable, and sustainable policy implementation.

2.5 Literature Gaps

The reviewed studies such as those by UNESCO (2021), Olaniyan (2020), and Banda (2020) have contributed to understanding the effects of free education policies in improving access and equity. However, most focus on quantitative indicators such as enrolment and retention, leaving administrative processes underexplored. The work of Mwansa (2021) highlights teacher challenges but does not fully investigate how administrative structures influence implementation. Likewise, Phiri (2021) addresses resource distribution but overlooks its governance mechanisms.

Furthermore, Zambian research often relies on national statistics rather than school-level qualitative evidence, neglecting localised experiences in urban settings such as Lusaka District. A number of authoritative analyses of Zambia's Free Education Policy rely predominantly on national administrative and survey data. Ministry of Education statistical bulletins summarise Annual School Census (ASC) figures but do not capture school-level implementation dynamics (Ministry of Education, 2022). Think-tank and international assessments similarly use national datasets and modelling to estimate impact and fiscal implications (ZIPAR, 2023; UNU-WIDER, 2023), while development partners' budget briefs focus on sector financing and teacher numbers at the national level (UNICEF, 2023). Civil-society reviews draw on these same national indicators to critique policy performance (ZANEC, 2022). These important works therefore provide a strong quantitative foundation but leave a gap in qualitative, school-level, contextual evidence especially in urban districts such as Lusaka justifying the present study's localised case-study approach." There is also limited analysis of the policy-practice gap, such as how frontline implementers like headteachers and teachers interpret and apply the Free Education Policy. Finally, while public administration theories have been widely used to analyze governance in other sectors, few studies have applied frameworks such as Systems Theory and Policy Implementation Theory to education policy in Zambia.

This study fills these gaps by examining the Free Education Policy through an administrative lens, focusing on implementation dynamics, institutional coordination, and local school experiences in Lusaka District.

2.6 Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored on two interrelated theories: Systems Theory and Policy Implementation Theory, which together provide a multidimensional framework for understanding how the Free Education Policy operates within Zambia's education system.

1. Systems Theory (Ludwig von Bertalanffy, 1968)

Systems Theory posits that organizations function as interdependent systems whose components must operate harmoniously for the whole to function effectively. Applied to this study, the education system is viewed as comprising interconnected subsystems like schools, teachers, administrators, the Ministry of Education, and community stakeholders. Failures in any component, such as delayed resource allocation or poor communication, disrupt overall performance. In the context of Zambia's FEP, the theory explains how weaknesses in one administrative unit (e.g., DEBS) can undermine teaching and learning outcomes across the system. Thus, Systems Theory emphasizes coordination, feedback, and systemic alignment in achieving educational goals.

This theory aligns with this study in that it helps investigate how the various interdependent systems operate in the implementation of the Free Education Policy in selected Public Primary Schools in Lusaka District.

2. Policy Implementation Theory (Pressman & Wildavsky, 1973)

Policy Implementation Theory examines the gap between policy intentions and outcomes. Pressman and Wildavsky argue that successful policy delivery requires clear communication, sufficient resources, and effective institutional capacity. In Zambia, while the Free Education Policy's intent is equitable access, its implementation is hindered by administrative inefficiencies, resource shortages, and weak feedback mechanisms.

This theory connects to this study in that it provides a lens to analyze how the translation of policy goals into practice is affected by structural and managerial challenges at school level.

Together, these theories underpin the study's analysis of how systemic coordination and implementation capacity shape the successes and challenges of Zambia's Free Education Policy.

2.7 Conceptual Framework

Independent Variable (Policy) - Implementation of the Free Education Policy (FEP)

Dependent Variables (Outcomes)

The conceptual framework of this study links three key components of policy implementation:

1. **Policy Inputs** – Free Education Policy directives, school grants, teachers, infrastructure, and learning materials.
2. **Implementation Processes** – School responses such as class reorganisation, timetable adjustments, community engagement, and resource management.
3. **Policy Outcomes** – Increased enrolment, reduced dropouts, improved access, but also overcrowding, resource strain, and quality concerns.

The framework suggests that:

- When inputs are inadequate, implementation processes become strained.
- Strained processes lead to mixed outcomes: improved access but compromised quality.
- Effective implementation requires alignment between policy goals, resource allocation, and local administration.

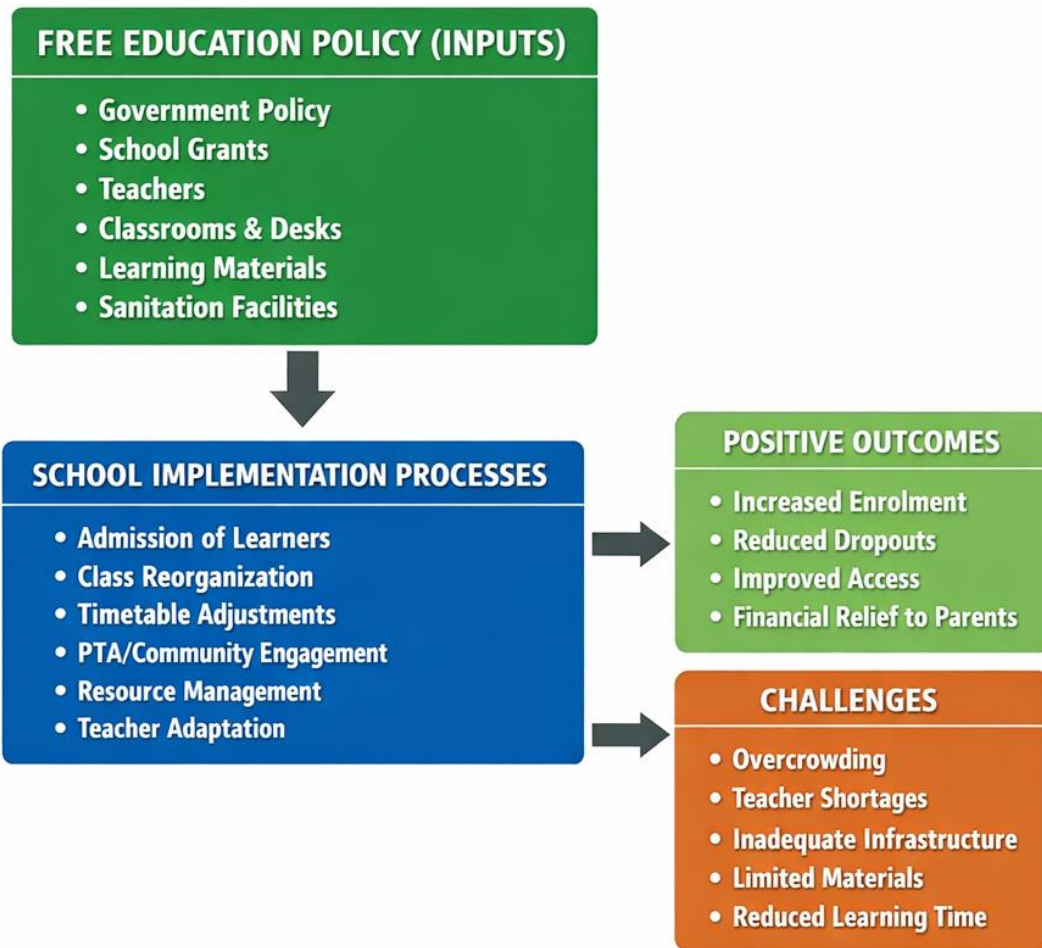


Figure 1: Conceptual Framework.

Chapter 3

Methodology

3.1 Introduction

This chapter outlines the methodological approach used in the study. It describes the research design, population, sample size, sampling procedures, data collection methods, data analysis techniques, and ethical considerations. The methodology is designed to explore how the Free Education Policy (FEP) has been implemented in selected public primary schools within Lusaka District. It further aims to understand the administrative processes, challenges, and successes that have accompanied this policy since its introduction.

The methodology is informed by Systems Theory (Ludwig von Bertalanffy, 1968) and Policy Implementation Theory (Pressman & Wildavsky, 1973), which together provide a framework for analyzing how interrelated actors and administrative mechanisms influence the effectiveness of policy implementation.

3.2 Research Approach

This study adopts a qualitative research approach, anchored within the interpretivist paradigm. The qualitative approach is most suitable because the research seeks to explore how school administrators, teachers, PTA representatives, and learners experience and interpret the implementation of the Free Education Policy in their daily school contexts. As Creswell (2014) explains, qualitative research enables the researcher to understand social phenomena from the participants' perspectives, emphasizing depth over breadth.

Under this approach, the study prioritizes subjective meanings, contextual realities, and participants' lived experiences rather than numerical generalizations. It allows for in-depth exploration of the processes, perceptions, and administrative realities underlying policy implementation. The interpretivist orientation recognizes that educational policies are experienced differently across contexts and that reality is socially constructed through human interaction (Schwandt, 2015).

Thus, this approach facilitates the understanding of how and why schools in Lusaka District have responded in particular ways to the Free Education Policy, capturing both the intended and unintended consequences of implementation through the voices of those directly involved.

The rationale for employing a qualitative research approach lies in the exploratory and descriptive nature of the study. Quantitative approaches, while useful for measuring policy outcomes, are limited in capturing the nuances of human experience and administrative dynamics that characterize policy execution at the school level. Since the study's objectives include examining responses, identifying successes, exploring challenges, and assessing resource allocation, a qualitative approach provides the flexibility and depth needed to address these aspects comprehensively.

Furthermore, qualitative research is particularly relevant for studies that aim to understand policy implementation in context, where social, institutional, and cultural factors interact in complex ways (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018). In the case of Zambia's Free Education Policy, schools operate under varying administrative, economic, and infrastructural conditions. The qualitative approach therefore enables the researcher to gather rich, context-specific insights that are often missed in survey-based or statistical analyses.

By focusing on participants' narratives, the study aligns with the interpretivist assumption that knowledge is co-constructed between the researcher and participants through interaction (Bryman, 2016). This makes it possible to uncover meanings that go beyond policy documents and official reports, providing an authentic account of how free education is being implemented and experienced at the school level.

3.3 Research Design

This study adopts a case study qualitative research design, which allows for an in-depth, holistic exploration of the implementation of the Free Education Policy (FEP) within its real-life administrative and institutional context. According to Yin (2018), a case study is an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-world setting, especially when the boundaries between the phenomenon and context are not clearly defined. This design is

therefore appropriate for understanding how schools in Lusaka District have responded to and operationalized the Free Education Policy in their daily administrative and instructional practices.

The case study design enables the researcher to explore the complexities of policy implementation, capturing multiple perspectives from different stakeholders, including school administrators, teachers, and parent representatives. It emphasizes understanding *processes* rather than mere *outcomes*, aligning well with the interpretivist philosophy and qualitative approach guiding this research (Stake, 1995).

Furthermore, the design allows for the integration of multiple data collection methods — such as interviews, document analysis, and observations — to generate rich, triangulated data. This helps in building a comprehensive understanding of the successes, challenges, and administrative dynamics that characterize the Free Education Policy at the school level.

The rationale for employing a case study design lies in the study’s aim to produce context-specific, detailed, and nuanced understanding of the Free Education Policy’s implementation in Zambia. Unlike surveys or experimental designs that prioritize breadth and generalisability, a case study provides depth, focusing on the “how” and “why” of policy implementation (Yin, 2018).

By concentrating on selected public primary schools within Lusaka District, the design allows the researcher to examine the interactions among policy actors — including school heads, teachers, parents and pupils within the real administrative and social environment in which the policy unfolds. This localised focus provides insight into the institutional, infrastructural, and human factors that influence implementation, making it possible to identify patterns and variations that may not be visible in national-level analyses.

Moreover, the case study approach supports the study’s theoretical grounding in Systems Theory and Policy Implementation Theory, as it emphasizes the interconnectedness of educational subsystems and explores the gap between policy formulation and execution. It allows for an examination of how systemic constraints — such as delayed funding, teacher shortages, and weak administrative communication — affect the realisation of policy goals at the school level.

The use of multiple cases (selected schools) also enhances analytic generalisation, where findings from the specific cases can inform broader understanding and theoretical insights about free education implementation across similar contexts (Yin, 2018; Merriam, 2009).

3.4 Study Area

The study is conducted in Lusaka District, Zambia's capital city, where public primary schools have experienced significant enrolment growth following the reintroduction of free education. The district presents a suitable case due to its diverse school settings urban, peri-urban, and high-density zones each exhibiting distinct administrative and resource challenges (MoE, 2022).

3.5 Target Population

The target population includes individuals directly involved in or affected by the implementation of the Free Education Policy at the school level. These include:

1. Head teachers and deputy head teachers (school administrators),
2. Classroom teachers,
3. Parent-Teacher Association (PTA) representatives.

This diverse population ensures that multiple administrative and experiential perspectives on the policy are captured.

3.6 Sampling Design and Sample Size

A purposive sampling technique will be employed to select participants who possess relevant experience and knowledge about the implementation of the Free Education Policy. Purposive sampling enables the researcher to intentionally include participants who can provide deep insights into administrative processes and outcomes (Patton, 2015).

The sample will include:

1. 3 Head teachers,

2. 3 Teachers,

4. 3 PTA representatives, and

This sample size is considered adequate for a qualitative case study, where depth of information is prioritized over breadth (Creswell, 2013).

3.7 Data Collection Methods

The study will use semi-structured interviews as the primary data collection method. This approach allows flexibility in probing participants' experiences while maintaining focus on the research objectives. The interviews will be conducted face-to-face, recorded (with consent), and later transcribed for analysis. Supporting data, such as Ministry of Education reports and school policy documents as well as observation will also be reviewed to triangulate findings.

3.8 Data Analysis

Given the qualitative nature of this study, data analysis will be conducted using thematic analysis, which is a flexible yet rigorous approach for identifying, analyzing, and interpreting patterns or themes within qualitative data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This method is suitable because it allows the researcher to make sense of participants' lived experiences and administrative realities in implementing the Free Education Policy (FEP) within the selected public primary schools in Lusaka District.

3.8.1 Analytical Process

The data analysis process will follow Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-step framework for thematic analysis, ensuring that the findings are systematically derived and credible:

1. Familiarization with the Data:

The researcher will begin by transcribing all interview data verbatim and reviewing documents such as school reports and policy circulars. This stage involves multiple

readings of the transcripts and notes to gain an in-depth understanding of participants' perspectives and the context of implementation.

2. **Generating Initial Codes:**

After immersion in the data, meaningful segments of text will be systematically coded.

Coding will be both deductive (guided by existing theories — Systems Theory and Policy Implementation Theory) and inductive (emerging from participants' own words and meanings).

For instance, codes may include “delayed funding,” “teacher shortages,” “community participation,” or “policy communication gaps.”

3. **Searching for Themes:**

Related codes will be grouped into potential themes that capture broader patterns of meaning. Examples of potential themes may include “administrative flexibility,” “resource constraints,” “implementation gaps,” and “stakeholder collaboration.”

4. **Reviewing Themes:**

The preliminary themes will be reviewed to ensure they accurately represent the coded data and align with the overall research objectives. At this stage, some themes may be refined, merged, or discarded to strengthen coherence.

5. **Defining and Naming Themes:**

Each theme will then be clearly defined and named to reflect its essence. For example, a theme such as “Administrative Flexibility” may describe how head teachers and staff adapt to shortages in teaching materials or staff.

6. **Producing the Report:**

The final stage involves synthesizing the themes into a coherent narrative that answers the research objectives and connects findings to the theoretical framework. Participant quotations will be used to illustrate key insights and to preserve the authenticity of their voices.

3.8.2 Analytical Framework Linkages

The analysis will be guided by two theoretical perspectives:

1. Systems Theory will help interpret how interrelated administrative subsystems (e.g., Ministry of Education, DEBS offices, schools, parents, and teachers) interact to influence the implementation process.

2. Policy Implementation Theory will guide the identification of gaps between the intended objectives of the Free Education Policy and its actual execution at the school level.

Themes that emerge will therefore be examined in light of how systemic coordination (Systems Theory) and implementation efficiency (Policy Implementation Theory) affect school-level outcomes.

Chapter 4

4.0 Presentation and discussion of findings

4.1 Introduction

This chapter presents and discusses the findings of the study based on the three research questions formulated in Chapter One. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews with Head Teachers, Teachers, and Parent Teacher Association (PTA) Representatives from selected public primary schools in Lusaka District. The presentation follows a thematic approach, consistent with the qualitative data analysis procedures outlined in Chapter Three.

The research questions guiding the study were:

1. How have public primary schools responded to the implementation of the Free Education Policy?
2. What successes have been recorded since the implementation of the policy?
3. What are the key challenges encountered during policy implementation?

4.2 Research Question One: Response of Public Primary Schools to the Free Education Policy

To understand how schools responded to the implementation of the Free Education Policy, the study sought perspectives from school administrators, teachers, and PTA representatives.

Head Teachers' Responses

All three Head Teachers indicated that their schools responded positively to the policy, mainly through accommodating all children seeking school places. The responses, however, highlighted increased enrolments and the need for administrative adjustments.

One Head Teacher explained:

“The Free Education Policy is good, putting all the learners in school. The school has responded positively by enrolling all the pupils that applied for admission.” (Head Teacher 1)

Another noted the introduction of additional learning sessions:

“Enrolment has increased and in response we have created more learning sessions and split large classes.” (Head Teacher 2)

The third Head Teacher highlighted the strain on physical space:

“We have up to 115 pupils in a classroom and have had to reduce learning time to allow other classes to use the same rooms.” (Head Teacher 3)

Teachers’ Responses

Teachers equally acknowledged positive reception of the policy, especially regarding inclusiveness. However, their responses also reveal increased class sizes and adjustments in instructional methods.

One teacher stated:

“The Free Education Policy was a welcome move. Children are free and joyful to attend school as no one is being turned away.” (Teacher 1)

Another described efforts to support diverse learners:

“Teaching and management have not changed much except that numbers have increased. We now use diversified learning to help new learners catch up.” (Teacher 2)

A third teacher noted improvements in pupil attendance:

“Pupils are attending regularly and showing progress. Some sit three on a desk due to large class numbers.” (Teacher 3)

PTA Representatives' Responses

PTA Representatives confirmed that schools have embraced the policy:

“The school responded well. It enrolled all pupils who came looking for places.” (PTA Rep 1)

Another respondent expressed the positive reception in a local language:

“Free Education iskulu yaliipokelela bwino sana. Abana nabafuma mumishi bali mumaskulu.”
(Translation: *The school received free education very well. Children from the community are now in school.*) (PTA Rep 2)

The responses indicate that schools responded positively to the Free Education Policy. The primary response was increased enrolment, this has placed pressure on classrooms, teachers, and timetables.

The findings revealed that public primary schools responded positively to the Free Education Policy by enrolling all learners seeking school places, including those who had previously dropped out. Schools adopted strategies such as creating additional learning sessions, splitting classes, and reorganising timetables to manage the influx of learners.

These findings are consistent with literature indicating that free education policies in developing countries lead to rapid increases in enrolment. For instance, UNESCO (2022) highlights that the removal of user fees significantly boosts school participation rates. Similarly, studies in Kenya's Free Primary Education Programme (Oketch & Rolleston, 2007) and Uganda (Nishimura et al., 2008) observed an immediate surge in enrolment, requiring schools to adopt internal strategies to cope with the increase.

The positive reception of the policy in Zambia aligns with Chishimba and Mwanza (2023), who argued that the Free Education Policy restored educational access for financially constrained households. The decision by schools to accommodate all learners further reflects the commitment of administrators to uphold the policy's objectives, despite structural challenges.

Overall, the findings align with regional and local literature: schools tend to welcome free education policies but face operational strain when enrolment expands faster than resources.

4.3 Research Question Two: Successes Recorded Since the Implementation of the Policy

Participants were asked to explain what successes had been observed since the policy was implemented.

Head Teachers' Responses

Head Teachers highlighted several benefits, including financial relief for parents and improved school resources through government grants.

One Head Teacher noted:

“Parents’ burdens have been lifted. The school receives grants, and CPD components allow teachers to improve through continuous learning.” (Head Teacher 1)

Another emphasized restored hope for learners:

“Drop-outs have returned. A pupil who stopped in 2016 came back to school. Grants are now guaranteed, and planning is effective. Desks are being provided.” (Head Teacher 2)

A third respondent noted limited success:

“The only positive outcome is increased enrolment. The challenges outweigh the successes.” (Head Teacher 3)

Teachers' Responses

Teachers highlighted improvements in enrolment and social outcomes:

“Enrolment has gone up. Some learners have come from private schools, and more children are off the streets.” (Teacher 1)

“The policy has embraced everyone, even those who had never been to school.” (Teacher 2)

“Pupils are benefiting largely and still receiving quality education despite large numbers.” (Teacher 3)

PTA Representatives' Responses

PTA respondents similarly acknowledged increased access:

“Parents are able to take their children to school and enrolment has increased.” (PTA Rep 1)

“Icisuma cakweba ati abana balesambilila nomba.”

(Translation: The good thing is that children are now learning.) (PTA Rep 2)

The key successes recorded include: Increased enrolment and access to education, Return of drop-outs to school, Guaranteed quarterly school grants, Government provision of desks, Financial relief for households, Ability of teachers to participate in CPD activities, Introduction of the school feeding program (noted as beneficial despite funding concerns), which shows that the Free Education Policy has significantly expanded access and reduced financial barriers to education.

These findings align strongly with international studies showing that free education policies broaden access, particularly for vulnerable learners. UNESCO (2021) states that fee removal increases participation among low-income households, consistent with your findings where parents reported relief and renewed ability to send children to school.

The return of learners who had previously dropped out supports literature on second-chance education. In Malawi, Tambulasi (2020) found that free primary education allows older learners to reintegrate into the formal school system a trend similarly observed in the data collected.

The government's provision of grants and desks aligns with Mbelwa (2022), who noted that the Zambian Ministry of Education scaled up school grants under the Free Education Policy to support operational needs. Teachers participating in CPD meetings also reflects literature that emphasises professional development as a key determinant of quality education (Darling-Hammond, 2017).

The introduction of the feeding program though challenging has been widely documented as a strong motivator for school attendance. The World Food Program (2020) concluded that school feeding programs increase enrolment, attendance, and nutrition outcomes, reinforcing the positive perceptions expressed by participants.

Thus, the successes observed in this study confirm empirical literature indicating that free education policies promote **access, equity, and improved learner welfare**, even when implemented in resource-constrained contexts.

4.4 Research Question Three: Challenges Encountered During Implementation

Despite the successes, respondents highlighted multiple implementation challenges.

Head Teachers' Responses

Head Teachers emphasized inadequate funding, overcrowding, and infrastructure shortages.

One Head Teacher explained:

“The Lower Primary grant is not adequate. Back then, school materials were provided, but not anymore. PTA cannot contribute financially, and the feeding program has increased expenses.”

(Head Teacher 1)

Another highlighted infrastructure limitations:

“There is a shortage of classrooms and no space for expansion. Teacher–pupil ratios are high. Toilets are insufficient.” (Head Teacher 2)

The third noted:

“Quality of education is compromised because learning hours are reduced. We have no staffroom, no wall fence, inadequate general workers, and no printer or photocopier.” (Head Teacher 3)

Teachers' Responses

Teachers reported challenges related to learner attendance, inadequate resources, and mixed-age enrolment.

“Attendance is inconsistent. Parents don't fully understand free education and there is absenteeism. Teacher–pupil ratio is very high, up to 120 per class.” (Teacher 1)

“Older pupils are enrolling and this creates discomfort. There is not enough manpower or teaching and learning materials.” (Teacher 2)

PTA Representatives' Responses

PTA participants stressed resource constraints and teacher strain:

"Inadequate resources have made it difficult for schools to perform certain activities." (PTA Rep 1)

"There is a strain on teachers due to over-enrolment." (PTA Rep 2)

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

4.5 Introduction

This chapter discusses the findings presented above and relates them to the literature reviewed in Chapter Two. The purpose of the discussion is to interpret the meaning of the results, show how they confirm or contradict existing knowledge, and connect them to the study's conceptual framework. The discussion is organised according to the three research questions that guided the study.

4.5.1 Discussion of Findings in Relation to Research Question One

How have public primary schools responded to the implementation of the Free Education Policy?

The findings revealed that public primary schools responded positively to the Free Education Policy by enrolling all learners seeking school places, including those who had previously dropped out. Schools adopted strategies such as creating additional learning sessions, splitting classes, and re organising timetables to manage the influx of learners.

These findings are consistent with literature indicating that free education policies in developing countries lead to rapid increases in enrolment. For instance, UNESCO (2022) highlights that the removal of user fees significantly boosts school participation rates. Similarly, studies in Kenya's Free Primary Education Programme (Oketch & Rolleston, 2007) and Uganda (Nishimura et al., 2008) observed an immediate surge in enrolment, requiring schools to adopt internal strategies to cope with the increase.

The positive reception of the policy in Zambia aligns with Chishimba and Mwanza (2023), who argued that the Free Education Policy restored educational access for financially constrained households. The decision by schools to accommodate all learners further reflects the commitment of administrators to uphold the policy's objectives, despite structural challenges.

However, the need to reduce contact hours and split classes, as observed in your findings, resonates with concerns raised in the literature. Mulenga (2022) noted that Zambian schools with limited infrastructure may struggle to maintain instructional quality following the removal of school fees. This confirms that while schools have responded positively, they have had to compromise certain operational aspects, especially learning time, due to inadequate infrastructure.

Overall, the findings align with regional and local literature: schools tend to welcome free education policies but face operational strain when enrolment expands faster than resources.

4.5.2 Discussion of Findings in Relation to Research Question Two

What successes have been recorded since the implementation of the policy?

The study established several successes, including increased enrolment, the return of dropouts, financial relief for households, guaranteed school grants, access to desks, and opportunities for teachers to participate in CPD activities.

These findings align strongly with international studies showing that free education policies broaden access, particularly for vulnerable learners. UNESCO (2021) states that fee removal increases participation among low-income households, consistent with your findings where parents reported relief and renewed ability to send children to school.

The return of learners who had previously dropped out supports literature on second-chance education. In Malawi, Tambulasi (2020) found that free primary education allows older learners to reintegrate into the formal school system—a trend similarly observed in your data.

The government's provision of grants and desks aligns with Mbelwa (2022), who noted that the Zambian Ministry of Education scaled up school grants under the Free Education Policy to support operational needs. Teachers participating in CPD meetings also reflects literature that emphasises professional development as a key determinant of quality education (Darling-Hammond, 2017).

The introduction of the feeding programme though challenging, has been widely documented as a strong motivator for school attendance. The World Food Programme (2020) concluded that school

feeding programmes increase enrolment, attendance, and nutrition outcomes, reinforcing the positive perceptions expressed by participants.

Thus, the successes observed in this study confirm empirical literature indicating that free education policies promote access, equity, and improved learner welfare, even when implemented in resource-constrained contexts.

4.6 Discussion of Findings in Relation to Research Question Three

What are the key challenges encountered during policy implementation?

Despite the successes, the findings revealed several challenges including:

Inadequate school grants, Overcrowded classrooms, High teacher–pupil ratios, Insufficient infrastructure (classrooms, toilets, staffrooms), Shortage of teaching and learning materials, Financial pressure from the feeding program, Lack of office equipment, Inconsistent learner attendance

These challenges mirror findings in regional and global literature on free education reforms:

Inadequate Funding and Grants

Your findings that grants are insufficient correspond with Zuze et al. (2020), who found chronic underfunding to be a major weakness of fee-free education systems in sub-Saharan Africa. In Zambia, Mwewa (2022) similarly noted that while school grants increased under the Free Education Policy, they remain inadequate for large, high-demand schools.

Overcrowding and High Teacher–Pupil Ratios

The study found classrooms with up to 115 learners. This aligns with UNESCO (2022), which warns that surges in enrolment without corresponding investment in infrastructure result in overcrowding. Similar challenges were recorded in Kenya’s FPE where class sizes exceeded 100 pupils in densely populated schools (Oduro, 2020).

This confirms literature stating that free education without proportional expansion of physical and human resources leads to quality compromise.

Inadequate Infrastructure

Your findings that schools lack classrooms, toilets, and staffrooms align with findings by Sinyangwe (2023), who reported that infrastructure gaps remain a major constraint in Zambian primary schools. This is further supported by World Bank (2019) documentation that free education increases stress on already limited school facilities.

Shortage of Learning and Teaching Materials

Several teachers noted shortages of materials, especially for Early Childhood Education (ECE). Mulenga (2021) argued that ECE is particularly affected when funding is limited, because ECE resources are more specialised and costly.

Challenges with the Feeding Programme

The finding that the feeding programme creates financial strain is consistent with Osei-Fosu (2019), who found that without sufficient funding, school feeding shifts operational burdens onto schools.

Mixed-Age Learners and Attendance Problems

The integration of older learners returning to school is also documented in fee-free contexts. Studies in Uganda (Nishimura et al., 2008) found that teachers struggled to manage classrooms with widely varying ages due to the influx caused by free education. Overall, the challenges identified in your study confirm literature stating that free education policies must be accompanied by adequate funding, infrastructure expansion, and teacher recruitment to sustain quality outcomes.

4.5.4 Implications of the Findings

Policy Implications

The findings imply that while the Free Education Policy has improved access, it must be complemented by increased financing, infrastructure development, and teacher recruitment to sustain quality learning environments.

Administrative Implications

School administrators must continue to innovate with internal strategies such as classroom management adjustments, efficient use of grants, and strengthened monitoring of attendance.

Theoretical Implications

The findings align with Public Administration theories on policy implementation, particularly Lipsky's "Street-Level Bureaucrat" theory, which posits that frontline workers adapt policies based on available resources. This was evident in how head teachers and teachers improvised to accommodate increased enrolments.

4.6 Conclusion

The discussion indicates that the Free Education Policy has achieved significant strides in expanding access to primary education in Lusaka District. However, this expansion has placed considerable pressure on schools, resulting in challenges that threaten the quality of education delivery. The findings are largely consistent with the reviewed literature, confirming that free education policies must be accompanied by substantial investments in resources and infrastructure. These insights form the foundation for the recommendations presented in the next chapter.

Chapter 5

Summary, Conclusion, and Recommendations

5.1 Summary of Key Findings

This study examined the implementation of public policy specifically of the Free Education Policy (FEP) in selected public primary schools in Lusaka District. The objectives were to:

1. Examine how public primary schools have responded to the implementation of the Free Education Policy.
2. Identify the successes recorded since the implementation of the policy.
3. Explore the challenges faced by school administrators and teachers in policy execution.

A qualitative case study design was employed, involving interviews with head teachers, teachers, and PTA representatives. The findings revealed that while the FEP has increased access to education, its implementation faces constraints, including resource shortages, overcrowding, and limited administrative support.

5.1.1 School Responses to Policy Implementation

Schools responded to the FEP through several adaptive strategies:

Admitting all eligible learners: Schools responded positively by enrolling all learners eligible under the policy.

Removing user fees: Education became more accessible and affordable.

Engaging communities: Schools collaborated with parents and community stakeholders to raise awareness and support.

Splitting classes and rotating learners: Coping strategies such as class splitting and learner rotation were adopted to manage increased enrolment.

Adjusting teaching schedules: Timetables were optimized to ensure effective use of limited teaching time.

5.1.2 Successes of the Free Education Policy

The study highlighted several positive outcomes:

Increased enrolment: Learner numbers increased directly due to the FEP.

Improved access for vulnerable learners: The policy allowed children from low-income households to return to school.

Positive community perception of government commitment: Communities recognized the government's commitment to education.

Reduction in school dropouts: Learners who had previously left school returned following policy implementation.

Focus on teaching: Schools could prioritize learning rather than managing fee collection disputes.

5.1.3 Challenges in Policy Execution

Implementation challenges included:

Classroom overcrowding: Pupil numbers often exceeded recommended teacher-student ratios.

Teacher shortages: Insufficient staff led to fatigue and reduced instructional quality.

Insufficient teaching and learning materials: Many schools lacked adequate instructional resources.

Sanitation concerns: Facilities were strained, posing health and safety risks.

Inadequate funding: School grants did not sufficiently cover operational needs.

Limited administrative support: Monitoring and support from educational authorities were insufficient.

5.2 Conclusion

The Free Education Policy is a transformative social intervention that has increased access to education and enhanced equity in Lusaka District.

The study demonstrates that the implementation of the FEP aligns with Public Administration theories on policy implementation, particularly Systems Theory, which emphasizes the interdependence of system components. The increase in enrolment (input) affected school processes (teaching, resource allocation, lesson delivery) and outputs (quality, participation), confirming that systemic strain arises when resources do not scale proportionally.

From a policy implementation perspective, the findings illustrate a *hybrid model*:

1. **Top-down challenges:** Limited resource allocation, overcrowded classrooms, and unclear guidelines hindered effective implementation.
2. **Bottom-up adaptation:** Head teachers and teachers exercised discretion, reorganizing classes, modifying teaching methods, and mobilizing community support.

The research underscores that successful implementation depends not only on policy design but also on local-level decision-making, resource availability, and frontline innovation. Sustainability of the FEP requires strengthening school capacity, improving administrative support, and ensuring adequate funding.

5.3 Recommendations

5.3.1 Recommendations for Schools

1. Develop internal strategies to manage increased enrolment, such as class rotation, team teaching, and optimized timetabling.
2. Strengthen community engagement through PTAs, community meetings, and sensitization programs.
3. Enhance teacher support through peer mentoring and workload management systems.

5.3.2 Recommendations for the Ministry of Education

1. Increase funding for primary school grants to address overcrowding and resource gaps.
2. Recruit additional teachers to reduce classroom strain and improve instructional effectiveness.
3. Invest in infrastructure expansion, including classrooms, sanitation facilities, and learning materials.
4. Strengthen monitoring and supervision, ensuring regular follow-ups and clear policy guidance.
5. Establish feedback channels for administrators to request support and report implementation challenges.

5.3.3 Recommendations for Future Research

1. Conduct studies with larger samples to enhance generalizability.
2. Undertake comparative studies between urban and rural schools to assess geographic variations in policy implementation.
3. Conduct quantitative research on the long-term impact of free education on learner performance.
4. Evaluate the adequacy of school grants and resource planning under the FEP.

References

1. Bertalanffy, L. von. (1968) *General System Theory: Foundations, Development and Applications*. New York: George Braziller.
2. Chileshe, P. (2023) ‘School infrastructure and learning outcomes in urban Zambia’, *Zambian Journal of Education*, 7(1), pp. 45–60.
3. Creswell, J.W. (2014) *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative and Mixed Methods Approaches*. 4th edn. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications.
4. Darling-Hammond, L. (2017) ‘Teacher education around the world: What can we learn from international practice?’, *European Journal of Teacher Education*, 40(3), pp. 291–309.
5. Grindle, M.S. (1980) *Politics and Policy Implementation in the Third World*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
6. Ministry of Education (1996) *Educating Our Future: National Policy on Education*. Lusaka: Government of the Republic of Zambia.
7. Ministry of Education (2022) *Free Education Policy Implementation Guidelines*. Lusaka: Government of the Republic of Zambia.
8. Moonga, C. and Mufune, P. (2022) ‘Policy implementation challenges in Zambia’s education sector’, *International Journal of Educational Development*, 89, 102530.
9. Nishimura, M., Yamano, T. and Sasaoka, Y. (2008) ‘Impacts of universal primary education on attainment and private costs in rural Zambia’, *International Journal of Educational Development*, 28(2), pp. 151–163.
10. Pressman, J.L. and Wildavsky, A. (1973) *Implementation: How Great Expectations in Washington Are Dashed in Oakland*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
11. Sabates, R., Hossain, A. and Lewin, K.M. (2013) ‘School dropout in Bangladesh: New insights from longitudinal evidence’, *International Journal of Educational Development*, 33(3), pp. 225–232.
12. UNESCO (2021) *Global Education Monitoring Report 2021/2*. Paris: UNESCO Publishing.
13. World Bank (2022) *Zambia Public Expenditure Review: Education Sector*. Washington, DC: World Bank. Zambia National Education Coalition (ZANEC) (2022) *Monitoring the Implementation of the Free Education Policy in Zambia*. Lusaka: ZANEC.

All communication should be addressed to
The Provincial Education Office and not
To only individual

Telephone: +260 211 125065/ 251220
Fax: +260 - 251009



REPUBLIC OF ZAMBIA
MINISTRY OF EDUCATION

OFFICE OF THE PROVINCIAL EDUCATION OFFICER
LUSAKA REGIONAL HEADQUARTERS
PRIVATE BG RW 21E
LUSAKA

In Reply please quote

No.....

13th November, 2025

The District Education Board Secretary
LUSAKA DISTRICT

RE: DATA COLLECTION: SAFELI MWELWA

The above subject matter refers.

Ms. Safeli Mwelwa is a student pursuing a **Bachelor of Science in Public Administration** program, currently in **year 4 Semester 2** of study at University of Lusaka.

The student is seeking data to enable her write a mandatory dissertation for the award of her degree. She needs to be assisted with the data required in line with her research title to enable her complete and submit it on time.

In view of the above, I write to inform you that permission has been granted to the student to collect data in your district.

You are being informed accordingly.

T. Changwe
**PROVINCIAL EDUCATION OFFICER
LUSAKA PROVINCE**

lsm

Appendix 1.

Data Collection Tool (Interview Guide)

Study Title:

A Case Study of the Implementation of the Free Education Policy in Selected Public Primary Schools in Lusaka District.

Purpose:

The purpose of this interview is to gather insights on how the Free Education Policy has been implemented in public primary schools, focusing on school responses, successes and challenges.

Target Respondents:

1. Head Teachers
2. Teachers
3. Parent-Teacher Association (PTA) Representative

Section A: Interview Questions

Objective 1:

To examine how public primary schools have responded to the implementation of the Free Education Policy.

Questions for Head Teachers

1. How did your school initially react when the Free Education Policy was introduced?
 - What changes happened immediately?
 - What preparations did the school make?
2. How did enrolment levels change after the policy was introduced?
 - By approximately how much did enrolment increase?
 - How did this affect school operations?
3. What administrative changes did the school make to accommodate increased enrolment?
 - Did you reorganize classes? How?
 - Did you adjust timetables? Explain.

4. How did the school engage parents and the community regarding the policy?
 - Were meetings held? With whom?
 - How did parents respond?
5. What strategies did you adopt to manage overcrowding?
 - Class rotation?
 - Team teaching?
 - Use of temporary classrooms?

Questions for Teachers (Objective 1)

1. How did teaching change after the Free Education Policy was implemented?
 - Did your workload increase? How?
2. How did you manage large class sizes?
 - What teaching methods did you use?
 - Did you group learners?
3. How did pupils respond to free education?
 - Attendance?
 - Participation?
 - Behaviour?
4. Did you receive any training or support after the policy was introduced?
 - From school?
 - From Ministry of Education?

Questions for PTA Representatives (Objective 1)

1. How did parents react to the Free Education Policy?
 - Were parents supportive? Why?
2. How did the school communicate the policy to the community?
 - Meetings? Sensitisation?
3. In your view, how well did the school implement the policy?
 - What did they do well?
 - What could have been better?

Objective 2:

To identify the successes recorded since the implementation of the policy.

Questions for Head Teachers

1. What positive changes have occurred since the policy was implemented?
 - Enrolment?
 - Dropouts?
 - Access for vulnerable learners?
2. Has the school benefited from government grants?
 - How are the grants used?
 - Are they adequate? Why/why not?

3. Has the policy reduced financial burden on parents?
 - How do parents feel now compared to before?
4. Have you received desks or materials from government?
 - How many?
 - Were they sufficient?

Questions for Teachers

1. What positive outcomes have you observed for learners?
 - Attendance?
 - Participation?
 - Academic progress?
2. Have you seen fewer children on the streets since free education?
 - Why is this important?
3. Has free education helped vulnerable learners? How?

Questions for PTA Representatives

1. What benefits have parents seen from free education?
 - Financial relief?
 - More children in school?
2. Have dropouts returned to school?
 - Why did they return?
3. How do parents view government commitment to education now?

Objective 3:

To explore the challenges faced by school administrators and teachers in policy execution.

Questions for Head Teachers

1. What are the main challenges your school faces under free education?
 - Classrooms?
 - Teachers?
 - Sanitation?
2. Are school grants adequate? Why/why not?
 - How much do you receive?
 - What needs are unmet?
3. How has overcrowding affected learning?
 - Teaching time?
 - Quality of education?
4. How has the feeding programme affected your school?
 - Financially?
 - Administratively?
5. What support do you receive from the Ministry of Education?
 - Monitoring?

- Guidance?
- Supervision?

Questions for Teachers

1. What difficulties do you face in teaching large classes?
 - Time?
 - Materials?
 - Individual attention?
2. Do you have enough teaching materials?
 - What is missing?
3. How has overcrowding affected slow learners?
4. Do you receive professional development support?
 - CPD meetings?
 - Funding?

Questions for PTA Representatives

1. What challenges do you see in your child's school?
 - Overcrowding?
 - Toilets?
 - Desks?
2. Do parents feel the school is adequately supported? Why/why not?
3. What would you like government to improve?

CLOSING QUESTION (ALL RESPONDENTS)

1. What recommendations would you give to improve the implementation of Free Education Policy?

Appendix 2.


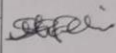

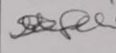

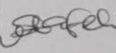

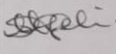

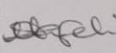
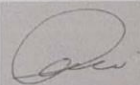
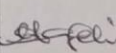

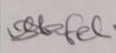


School of Education social sciences and Technology

D400 Supervisory meeting Form

Student's Name MWELWA SAFELI

Supervisor..... Lloyd Nsingo (Mr).....

Date of meeting	Issues discussed and actions agreed	Supervisor's signature	Student's signature
00/8/25	- Discussed recasting the Title to ensure variables are clear and stand out . - Guided how the Title, Introduction statement of the Problem and objectives required to speak to each other.		
00/8/25	- Discussed chapter 2 specifically Systematic Literature Review. - Discussed Theoretical and conceptual Frameworks.		
00/09/25	- Discussed Chapter 3 specifically methodology and how it would be situated within the selected research paradigm.		
00/0925	- Discussed Data Collection methods		
00/10/25	- Discussed data analysis method and reporting		
00/11/25	- Feedback and discussion on perceived weaknesses of chapter 4		
00/12/25	Discussed Chapter 5		

Appendix 3