



The Impact Of The Free Education Policy On Infrastructure And Learning Materials At Primary School Level: A Case Of Selected Schools In Kabwe District

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Paper Id: IJRTSSH-18046

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Abstract- The Free Education Policy introduced in Zambia was designed to increase equitable access to primary education by removing tuition-related financial barriers. While the policy has significantly improved enrollment levels, it has also created challenges related to infrastructure development and availability of learning materials. This study examined the impact of the Free Education Policy on infrastructure and learning materials in selected primary schools in Kabwe District. A mixed-method research design was adopted, involving 60 respondents comprising teachers, head teachers, education officials, and community members. Data were collected through questionnaires and interviews and analyzed using descriptive statistics and thematic analysis. The findings indicate that although access to education has improved, schools are experiencing severe overcrowding, inadequate classrooms, insufficient desks and chairs, poor sanitation facilities, and shortages of textbooks and library resources. The study concludes that the policy has had both positive and negative effects, improved access while compromising quality. The study recommends increased government funding, infrastructure expansion, improved resource allocation, and strengthened monitoring systems to ensure quality education delivery.

Keywords: Free Education Policy, Infrastructure, Learning Materials, Primary Education, Kabwe District, Zambia.

I. Introduction

Education is a fundamental human right and a key driver of national development. It contributes to the development of human capital by equipping individuals with knowledge, skills, and values necessary for participation in economic and social life. In recognition of its importance, governments across the world have implemented policies aimed at improving access to education.

In Zambia, the introduction of the Free Education Policy marked a significant milestone in the education sector. The policy was designed to eliminate tuition fees at primary and secondary levels, thereby increasing access to education for all children regardless of socio-economic background. This initiative aligns with global commitments such as Education for All (EFA), the Dakar Framework for Action, and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly Goal 4, which emphasizes inclusive and equitable quality education.



Following the implementation of the policy, primary school enrollment rates increased significantly across the country. However, this rapid increase has placed considerable pressure on existing school infrastructure and learning materials. Many schools, particularly in urban and peri-urban areas such as Kabwe District, have struggled to accommodate the growing number of learners.

Overcrowded classrooms, insufficient desks, inadequate sanitation facilities, and shortages of textbooks have become common challenges. These conditions raise concerns about whether the quality of education is being maintained under the Free Education Policy. Therefore, it is important to examine the impact of this policy on infrastructure and learning materials in primary schools.

II. Problem Statement

Although the Free Education Policy has successfully increased access to primary education in Zambia, its implementation has created significant challenges in school infrastructure and learning materials. In Kabwe District, selected primary schools are experiencing overcrowding, inadequate classrooms, insufficient furniture, and lack of essential learning resources.

These challenges negatively affect the teaching and learning process, leading to reduced learner performance and teacher effectiveness. If these issues are not addressed, the intended goals of the Free Education Policy may not be fully achieved. Therefore, there is a need to assess the extent to which the policy has impacted infrastructure and learning materials in selected primary schools.

III. Objectives Of The Study

The study aimed to:

- Assess the condition of school infrastructure in selected primary schools
- Examine the availability of learning materials
- Determine the effects of increased enrollment on school facilities
- Propose strategies to improve infrastructure and learning resources

IV. Methodology

Research Design

The study employed a descriptive research design using both qualitative and quantitative approaches to provide a comprehensive understanding of the problem.

Sample Size

A total of 60 respondents participated in the study as follows:



Category	Number
Teachers	25
Head teachers	5
Education officials	10
Community members	20
Total	60

Data Collection Methods

Data were collected using:

Structured questionnaires

Semi-structured interviews

Data Analysis

Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics such as frequencies and percentages, while qualitative data were analyzed thematically.

V. Findings And Analysis

Condition of School Infrastructure

Infrastructure Aspect	Adequate (%)	Inadequate (%)
Classrooms	30%	70%
Furniture (desks/chairs)	32%	68%
Toilets	38%	62%
Playgrounds	45%	55%

The findings indicate that most schools are operating under poor infrastructure conditions. Classrooms are insufficient, forcing some schools to operate in shifts. Furniture shortages have led to pupils sharing desks, while others sit on the floor. Poor sanitation facilities were also highlighted as a major concern, particularly in overcrowded schools.

Classroom Congestion

Level of Congestion	Frequency	Percentage
Overcrowded	48	80%
Moderate	8	13%
Adequate	4	7%

Overcrowding is a major challenge, with most classrooms holding more pupils than they were designed for. This affects teacher-pupil interaction and reduces lesson effectiveness.



Availability of Learning Materials

Learning Material	Available (%)	Not Available (%)
Textbooks	42%	58%
Libraries	30%	70%
Teaching aids	48%	52%

The results show that learning materials are insufficient. The shortage of textbooks forces learners to share, reducing individual learning opportunities. Many schools also lack functional libraries.

Textbook–Pupil Ratio

Subject	Recommended	Actual
English	1:1	1:4
Mathematics	1:1	1:5
Science	1:1	1:6

The imbalance between recommended and actual ratios demonstrates a severe shortage of learning materials, negatively affecting academic performance.

Sanitation Facilities

Facility Type	Adequate (%)	Inadequate (%)
Toilets	38%	62%
Water Supply	35%	65%

Poor sanitation poses health risks and affects attendance, especially among girls, contributing to absenteeism and dropout risks.

VI. Discussion

The findings reveal that the Free Education Policy has had mixed outcomes. On one hand, it has significantly increased access to education, ensuring that more children are enrolled in school. On the other hand, the rapid increase in enrollment has not been matched with adequate investment in infrastructure and learning materials.

The shortage of classrooms and furniture has resulted in overcrowding, which reduces teaching effectiveness and learner participation. In addition, inadequate textbooks limit learners' ability to study independently and perform well academically. These findings are consistent with the view that access without quality compromises educational outcomes.

The study also reveals that infrastructure challenges are more pronounced in densely populated areas such as Kabwe District. This suggests the need for targeted resource allocation based on enrollment pressure.



VII. Conclusion

The study concludes that the Free Education Policy has improved access to primary education in Kabwe District but has negatively affected infrastructure and learning materials. Schools are struggling to cope with increased enrollment, resulting in overcrowded classrooms and insufficient resources.

If these challenges are not addressed, the quality of education may decline despite increased access. Therefore, there is a need for balanced policy implementation that considers both access and quality.

VIII. Recommendations

- Government should increase funding for school infrastructure development
- Additional classrooms should be constructed to reduce overcrowding
- Schools should be supplied with adequate desks and chairs
- Provision of textbooks should be prioritized
- School libraries should be established and equipped
- Sanitation facilities should be improved
- Education authorities should strengthen monitoring and evaluation systems

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