

The Impact of Free Education Policy on the Provision of Quality Education and Access to Tertiary Education in Zambia. A Case of Selected Schools and Colleges of Livingstone District.

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Abstract— In the quest to improve and increase access to education at both primary and secondary levels of education systems, the government of the republic of Zambia introduced the free education policy in 2022. Despite this progressive measure, there are a lot of challenges which need to be addressed to achieve the objectives of this policy. The purpose of the study was to investigate and establish the impact of free primary and secondary education on the provision of quality education and access to tertiary education in Zambia. The study used the survey design. The main research instruments were the interview guide, questionnaire and observation checklist. Purposive and simple random sampling techniques were used in selecting the respondents. The findings of the study revealed that while access to education has improved in primary and secondary schools, the quality of education being provided is compromised. It was reported that enrolment levels increased in grade one and grade eight. However, due to the stoppage of PTA fees, which was the main source of schools' income, many infrastructure projects have stalled. The study also revealed that due to inadequate funds, schools were unable to purchase the required teaching and learning materials thereby raising the pupil-material ratio. Another serious challenge reported by school administrators was the shortage of teachers to handle overwhelming numbers of pupils in classes.

Looking at the impact this free education policy has on higher education institutions, the study revealed that, enrolment levels have slightly improved in colleges as most parents are able to save money for

college tuition due to school fees relief in secondary and primary schools. The study recommended that government should increase the termly grant for schools and should continue with recruitment of new teachers so as to normalize the teacher- pupil and material- pupil ratios respectively.

Key words: Free education, Quality education, School fees, Sustainable Development Goal 4

I. INTRODUCTION

In 2003, Zambia introduced free education as part of government policy to improve access to education. In its first six months in office Zambia's New Dawn government, as the UPND Government is commonly called, delivered one of its key campaign promises to make education free and accessible to all children at both primary and secondary level. It is against this backdrop that, this study sought to investigate the challenges and impacts of this free education policy on the provision of quality education and access to tertiary education

A. Background

The main point At independence in 1964, education in Zambia was made free and the government embarked on the development of the educational system through a number of policy reform. [1]. During this era Zambia was a relative rich country and was able to sustain a system of free education of economic prosperity due to favourable price of copper on international market

(Mulenga 2010). However, the system could not be sustained as a result of deterioration of the country's economy following a world economic crisis of the 1970s when there was a sharp drop in copper prices on the international market. [2]. The government, therefore came up with a cost sharing policy that required parents and other stakeholders to take a share in the cost of education hence user fees and parent-Teacher Association (PTA) fee were introduced in 1976 (MOE Boards, 2005).

The introduction of user fees and PTA, fees including the requirement for exercise books and uniform became a great obstacle to accessing basic education by children from poor families. This situation was that a large number of children would be enrolled in school, but as they ascend the basic ladder, a number of them left school prematurely due to their poor socio-economic background. [3]. It is worth to note here about 68% of Zambians population are classified as poor living below the poverty (Silukuni, 2016).

It cannot be gainsaid that education is at the centre of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (SDGs) as it is a fundamental human right. [4]. One of the targets of Sustainable Development Goal number 4 (Quality education) is to ensure that all girls and boys complete free, equitable and quality primary and secondary education leading to relevant learning outcomes (Hapombwe, Correia and Mwanza 2020). To achieve this target, Zambia like other African countries, is striving to ensure universal equal access to inclusive and equitable quality education and learning, by providing quality and compulsory education, leaving no one behind irrespective of their gender, disabilities, social and economic situation.

[5]. According to the Ministry of Education (MOE) Policy document 'Educating our future (MOE 1996)', quality and access to education are the bedrock of the education system. Progressive measures were put in place in order to make education accessible to all children in Zambia. [6]. According to United Nations Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF 2019), Zambia has scored some milestones in achieving near universal primary school completion levels and national statistics reveal a completion rate of 91.8 per cent at Grade 7. The Global Partnership for education in its report states how the Zambian government is making positive strides towards making education

accessible to all children, "The government of Zambia is committed to allocating more resources to the education sector in order to expand access to primary, secondary, and tertiary education.

[7]. Working with the Global Partnership for Education (GPE), the government of Zambia views education as a major factor in fighting poverty and hunger. This is the reason why the Zambian Education Curriculum Framework of 2013 is very categorical on making quality education accessible to all children regardless of their social background. "The education system seeks to promote equality of access, participation and benefit to all regardless of their individual needs and abilities. In view of this, institutions of learning should put in place measures to promote equity and equality in their programmes (MOE 2013: 18)." One of the measures institutions of learning were directed to put in place was the provision of bursary schemes and meals to learners from underprivileged homes.

B. Challenges in the provision of quality education

Although the Zambian government implemented the provisions and recommendations stipulated in the above mentioned educational policy documents, there is still a long way to go. Overall, rural children and girls countrywide continue to be at a disadvantage with a large number of them dropping out in the upper primary and secondary grades, and poorer levels of transition to senior secondary and tertiary levels. Results and reports from stake holders reveal that transition rates from primary to secondary school continue to remain low at 67.5 per cent, mainly due to the lack of places to accommodate all primary school graduates. Other barriers to children transitioning and completing secondary school include school fees introduced in Grade 8, other costs related to education and the long distances to many schools. For girls at secondary level, there are also barriers around the lack of menstrual hygiene facilities, the low value placed by some communities on girls' receiving a secondary education, teenage pregnancy, and child marriage. For students living in rural areas, the long distance to educational establishments presents an additional barrier. In fact, rural Zambia faces the most obstacles in keeping children in school because there are few

schools, often far from students' homes. Most rural Zambians cannot afford the costs of transportation to schools because rural areas face a higher rate of poverty.

[8]. Furthermore, impoverished families struggle to afford the costs of school fees. According to the World Bank (2016), the poverty rate in rural Zambia stood at 76.7% in 2015 while the urban rate stood at 23.4%. The World Bank also estimates that about 75% of Zambia's impoverished and underprivileged are found in rural communities. [9]. In Zambian rural communities where poverty levels are at its height, parents go to an extent of withdrawing girls from school in order to allow boy children go to school and also decide how long they may attend the school (Lyanga and Chen 2021).

[10]. Diamond TV (2022) reports that despite the abolishing of school fees at primary and secondary levels, pupils in the rural schools of Northern Province abandon schools as they follow their parents to fish camps so as to raise money for food and other essential needs. "Kasama District Education Board Secretary (DEBS) Andrew Chipili says most learners did not show up for the third term because majority followed their parents in fishing camps. Mr. Chipili told Diamond TV news that people in this area survive on seasonal activities such as fishing, caterpillar collections and seasonal farming.

He said the situation forced teachers to go and fetch for kids in the fishing camps to return back to school." (Diamond TV 11th September 2022)

[11]. These escalating levels of poverty have far-reaching impacts on access to education. Nkurunziza (2012) pointed out that children who do not go to school often end up in child labour in order to contribute to household income. Furthermore, in the quest to ease the economic burden in the family, parents marry off their young girls before they complete their secondary education. It cannot be denied that poverty is the major barrier to access quality education in rural Zambia. Practical measures to make education accessible to rural children will definitely lower both child labour and child marriage rates while providing a pathway to self-reliance and prosperity..

In order to improve access to education in rural Zambia, the government and other cooperating

partners should strive hard to eliminate poverty and make it a priority in aid efforts. In order to keep more children in school in Zambia, geographical boundaries and economic status must not stand as barriers to education.

C. Efforts to improve access to quality education in Zambia

Zambia has made significant gains in increasing access to education, but the education system continues to face challenges such as inadequate resources, poor education quality and low progression rates. A number of cooperating partners working with the Ministry of education are funding progressive projects which are aimed at working towards the access to quality education.

The World Bank (2020) reported that in partnership with the government of the republic of Zambia, it is implementing the Zambia Education Enhancement Project (ZEEP) since 2018. The development objectives of ZEEP are clear and categorical; the project aims at improving the quality of education in targeted secondary and primary levels. Furthermore the project focuses on putting measures in place which would increase access to secondary education focusing especially on girls.

Another innovation which is being implemented to increase access to education is the emergence of community schools in Zambia. Although there has been an expansion of educational provision over the years in Zambia, not every school-age child is in school. In response to the growing number of children not in school, community schools were established in various communities in the country to provide learning opportunities for school-age children and over-age children who were not in school.

The Campaign for Female Education (CAMFED) has been working in Zambia's rural areas, such as the northern region to support and improve girls' education. In particular, girls in rural areas face a higher rate of exclusion from education. Thus, CAMFED Zambia "empowers the most marginalized girls in rural Zambia to attain a full secondary school education." With CAMFED's efforts, the female students it supports "achieve a completion rate of 96% and a progression rate of 98%."

CAMFED also supports the education of other marginalized children. Since its beginning, CAMFED Zambia has helped more than 400,000 children obtain primary and secondary education through donor support. “CAMFED provides holistic support” in the form of “school or exam fees, uniforms, sanitary wear, books, pens, bikes, boarding fees or disability aids” to ensure children remain in school (CAMFED 2011).

The 8th National Development Plan spells out the clear road map on the education agenda for a period from 2022-2026. The plan resonates well with the UN agenda 2030 on education. The vision 2030 looks at enhancing access of quality and equitable and inclusive education, priority is placed on the provision of free education from early childhood to secondary level. Mwanza and Sihukuni (2020) study revealed that free education created a conflict between access and delivery of quality education. This compelled government to provide more teachers to mitigate the teacher pupil ration, provide more classrooms, more text books, more desks or furniture and other necessary teaching and learning materials in order to meet the demand of the increased enrolment levels in schools.

Within one year of coming to power, Zambia’s New Dawn government managed to fulfil its election promise to make education free at the primary and secondary level. As of January 2022, thousands more children across the country have been enrolled for full time education. Several measures have been taken to implement this policy. One of them was the unprecedented recruitment of 30,000 new teachers which is seen as a mitigation measure to staff crisis in schools.

Objectives

- a. To establish the impact of the Free education policy on the provision of quality education
- b. To establish the effects of free education on access to tertiary education by school leavers.
- c. To analyse the effect of free education on the enrolment in higher education institutions.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Available studies indicate that due to social benefits of primary education, most countries worldwide have prioritized primary education. [13]. UNESCO (2006) reported that in the United States of America (USA) elementary schooling is free and compulsory to all children. In India, the Central government provides 80 percent of financing Free Primary Education, while the local states implement and provide the rest of financing education. According to the International Conventions on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (1966) the right to education include the right to free, compulsory primary education for all. The right to education also includes a responsibility to provide basic education for individuals who have not completed primary education. . Furthermore, Belter and Dieter (2005) claimed that in addition to the access to education provisions, the right to education encompasses also the obligations to eliminate discrimination at all levels of the education system, to set minimum standards and to improve quality.

[14]. In support of the provision of free education, Siaciwena and Lubinda (2008) debated that charging of the school fees to the learners have had a negative impact on many governments around the world. It was because of such negative impacts that the Non-Governmental Organizations, had begun to champion user fee elimination for basic public services which included primary education. This was deep-rooted in the November 1948 declaration of human rights where members of the United Nations declared the right to education for all people worldwide, the aspect of investment in primary education has been a key element in the development process.

[15]. A wide body of evidence shows that the costs of schooling inhibit school enrolment. Saroso (2005) revealed that parents in Indonesia, China, the Solomon Islands and many African countries like Kenya, Malawi, Zambia, Uganda and Tanzania cite user fees as a major obstacle to enrolling their children in school. [16]. In agreement with this point, Sibanda (2016) observed that in Zambia it is estimated that at least 45 percent of children who drop out of school do so because they cannot pay school fees.

However, there are few empirical studies on the ways in which user fees impact enrolment. [17]. Sikwibele (2003) in her study mentioned that user

fees accounted for 31 percent of the time that children did not attend school. Before user fees were eliminated, children who did not pay school fees were often locked out of school or sent home. [18]. In the same vein Mashala (2019) pointed out that the government of the republic of Tanzania issued a secular to abolish all forms of fees that learners were paying from early childhood education to secondary education. This abolition of fees in schools enabled a lot of pupils to enrol into school. This increase in enrolment created some immediate need for more teachers, more classroom space, furniture and books for learners. The case is not different from that of Uganda and Kenya. [19]. Asankha, P. and Yamano, T. (2011) study revealed that universal free secondary education policy enabled more students to be in school. [20]. In Kenya as well, studies by Simatwa and Ngeno (2015) revealed that free education had an impact on the transition and progression from form one to form five. However there were variations depending on the location. Learners from some sub-counties such as Mbita and Suba sub-counties had a high dropout rate despite the free education due to other factors [21]. Graham (1996) observed that during the 1990s, in many parts of Africa, Latin America and Asia, the several economic crisis saw a reduction in the number of children enrolling in school. [22]. During the period between mid-1980s and 2000, most developing countries experience a decline in access to education due to poverty (Brown, 1996 and Chimombo, 2005). For example, 1990 only about three quarters of children in sub-Saharan in African countries were attending school, while about 130 million had either never attend school or had dropped out before completing the primary cycle (Colcough and Lewin, 1993). [23]. According to Colclough and Lewin (1993), the major causes of low demand to education was poverty in the sense that even where educational returns were high; the direct and indirect cost of school attendance were often too great for poor families to afford. Direct costs include school fees, examinations fees buying of learning materials such as books transport and lunches. Indirect or opportunity cost refer to the income or other economic contributions that a household sacrifices in order to keep a child in school. Direct cost usually make it difficult for the poor families send their children to school and if they are sent to

complete even the basic education cycle. Chimombo (2005) argues that poor children are normally malnourished which arguably lower their academic achievement levels. [24]. Where poor children do manage to enrol in school, poor nutrition and health can hinder their full participation and learning (Anne Mulenga, 2010). [25]. According to Muchimba D. (2006) explains that for poor families who can hardly afford the necessary meals, abolishment of school fees may not suffice because they may not send their children to school on an empty stomach. Colcough and Lewin (1993) observed that households with limited income in Africa tended to withdraw their children from school not only because of parents' inability to meet directly school cost, but also due to the fact that their children are sent to income generating errands and projects [26]. The study by Himpyali (1993) concentrated on establishing the relationship between education fees and the dropout rate particularly in secondary schools. The findings of his study showed that low socio-economic background of pupils may hinder educational achievement, and that is the reason why the affected children must be assisted. Himpyali's study leaves a gap in the sense that it only gave information about secondary school learning leaving out elementary or primary school education..

III. METHODOLOGY

A. Description of the study Area.

This study employed a case study research design. This type of design was chosen, as it is easy to collect the detailed data. Besides, case study design is not as expensive as experimental or survey design. This design can enable researcher easily participate in the process of data collection methods like interview, observation, questionnaire and focus group discussion (Cochran, 2002).

Using a case study design, the researcher was able to collect both primary data from education stakeholders and some secondary data from previous conducted research reports and various library documents.

B. Research approach.

This study employed a mixed research approach in which qualitative approach took dominance. This approach was opted because the study had a great deal of interpretation and analysis of individuals' views, opinions and perceptions in relation to the socio-economic and cultural contexts and status of respondents. (Kothari, 2004). However, the study has also some quantitative aspects whereby analysis and presentation of data utilized numerical data in form of percentages and fractions.

The simple random sampling procedure was chosen so as to provide each individual with an equal chance of being selected from the population after which data was collected from a larger percentage of this random subset. (Ghauri & Gronhaug, 2005). Purposive sampling was also used on selecting officers from DEBS and college officers from Registrars' offices in selected higher learning institutions. To elicit information from parents, a convenient sampling was used to interview parents living within the vicinity of selected schools.

In order to collect accurate data, Parents, teachers and students were randomly selected. This group of people was believed to have reliable information for the study. In this case, also purposive sampling was used in order to filter out irrelevant responses that may not be related to the context of the study. Consequently, students, teachers and parents were purposely selected to provide useful information for the study.

C. Sample size.

Sample size is a research term used for defining a small group of people included in a research study to represent the population. To determine the sample size, the researchers considered using Sloven's formula: $n = N / (1 + Ne^2)$ where:

- **n**: Sample size needed
- **N**: Population size
- **e**: Acceptable margin of error. In this study the estimated population was 89 while the confidence level was 95, giving 0.05

margin of error. The values were computed using the formula giving the sample size of 66.

Therefore the study included four (04) selected public secondary schools in Livingstone and Kazungula districts respectively with sixty (66) respondents comprising forty students, ten teachers, ten parents, four officers from the registrars' offices and 2 DEBS officials selected from the two districts

D. Data collection methods.

In this study, primary data collection methods used were self-administered questionnaires using open ended and closed ended questions, group interviews and group discussion

The Unstructured interviews were used to collect supplementary information from some parents, heads of departments and heads of school, parents and DEBSs. The interview method is easy and reliable as it enables the interviewer to change questions according to the reaction of the interviewee (Patton, 2004).

The study also used questionnaires to elicit vital information from pupils. The questionnaires contained both closed and open-ended questions. The study used books, articles, reports and internet engine to collect secondary data.

IV. FINDINGS

The study presents the findings and interpretation of data. The following are the Impacts of Free Education in Zambia, particularly in Livingstone and Kazungula districts. Respondents had varied perceptions on the free education policy which was introduced by the New Dawn government of Zambia. Most of them say that the policy was good and the government was indeed delivering on its campaign promises when in opposition. They said the policy aims at improving education to the great extent and increase access to it by all.

A. Presentation of Findings

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Increase in pupil enrolment

The study sought head teachers’ opinions on the effect of free education on enrolment of pupils. The responses from head teachers and teachers were clear and categorical; the main reason for abolishing school fees was to enable children from the poor families to access education up to secondary level. In their responses, most of the parents argued that school fees and other direct costs that households were paying represented a significant obstacle and impediment to enrolment, especially for children that come from poor families and homes

Head teachers argued further that abolishing school fees will make it easier and less costly for the children to enroll in school which will be some positive steps and progress towards the achievement of Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) number four which ensures access to inclusive equitable quality education. Indeed, all the schools visited during the study revealed an upward mobility in terms of enrolment class by class and general surge in school population. Class registers records at one of the shanty compound schools in Maramba Township, showed that some classes had almost doubled the number of grade eight pupils in 2022 compared to 2021 enrolment. For example grade eight B enrolled 44 pupils in 2021 but the following year in 2022, the number of pupils in grade eight B increased to 68.

In Kazungula district, records showed that in the past two years the number of pupils enrolled in primary schools was slightly lower than the enrolment in 2022 when fees were abolished. This increase in primary schools enrolment in 2022, although primary education had been free since 2003, was motivated by free secondary education. This trend was the same at secondary school level. According to the class registers in four secondary schools in both Livingstone and Kazungula districts, there was tremendous increase in the first term enrolment of the year 2022 compared to the figures of the previous three years.

Parents in Kazungula rural communities expressed positive opinions towards the abolition of school fees. They pointed out that before the abolition of fees; they were unable to send their children to school. This, they attested, was the contributing factor to child labour and early marriages. It was a collective belief by many parents that the abolition of fees would increase the chances of children from poor families to go to secondary schools if they get selected. In addition, parents felt optimistic that with free primary and secondary education, they will be able to save enough money send their children to university and college.

Impact of Free Education on the adequacy of teaching and learning materials.

Table 1. Shows the responses of respondents (pupils) on whether over-enrolment created inadequacy of learning materials

Responses	Percentage	Number Of Respondents
AGREED	80%	32
DISAGREED	20%	8

The table above shows that 80 % (32) of the respondents agreed to the assertion that over enrolment in classes has created inadequacy of learning materials such as text books. On the other hand 20 % (8) of respondents disagreed that increase in enrolment has caused or affected the adequacy of learning materials in schools.

The Head teachers from both Livingstone and Kazungula districts reported on the ratio of textbooks to students in their schools. It was reported that many schools in the two districts were not anywhere near the acceptable ratio of 1 textbook to 2 students and the situation in rural schools was alarming. It cannot be disputed that textbooks are an important and indispensable teaching and learning materials in the delivery of quality education.

Heads of school made serious observations on the increase in enrolment with inadequate learning resources. This, according to teachers, has seriously compromised the quality of education as teachers are unable to offer individualized attention to learners They unanimously recommend that government should fund schools adequately and on

time so as to provide quality and equitable education. However, Head teachers were positive and confident that with the increase of Constituency Development Fund (CDF), schools will take advantage of the initiative and apply for funding so as to acquire the required teaching and learning materials, and consequently the situation in public schools would improve tremendously.

Impact of Free Education on the adequacy of physical facilities and teaching staff.

In order for teaching and learning to take place smoothly, there is need for some good sanitary facilities for the people involved. These facilities include toilets, water, classes and sporting facilities.

In some of the schools visited in both districts, the provision of toilets was found to be inadequate. For example, 50% of the schools had no well-ventilated staff toilets and without running water. In addition, although all the schools had boys' and girls' toilets, they were not adequate. It cannot be disputed that learning space plays a significant role in the provision of quality education. Overcrowding in class is a recipe for confusion and disruptive behavior that can frustrate the teacher's pedagogical activities. Most of the teachers who were asked whether the increase in enrolment affected the teachers' delivery of lessons replied in the affirmative. They replied that increased numbers of learners make it difficult for the teachers to manage their classes leading to disruptive behavior and creating conflicts among pupils. Head teachers also attested to the fact that large class size leads to poor classroom management, ineffective students' control, poor planning and assessment and overwhelms the teachers with stress.

However, the District Education Board Secretaries (DEBS) for both Livingstone and Kazungula Districts had different views. They explained that large class size does not reduce teachers' productivity and does not affect the teacher's ability to give out their best. According to the DEBS every teacher should be conversant with modern pedagogical techniques of teaching large classes without much stress. They pointed out that teachers are currently undergoing training on how to use digital tools and e-learning techniques on how to teach learners regardless of the size of classes. On the teacher pupil ratio, which was the

most teething issue when it comes to over enrolment, the DEBS replied that the recruitment of over 30 thousand teachers was a positive step on the right direction by government and it will solve the staffing crisis that hit the two districts for some time. It was verified from the Daily newspaper that the two districts had received a good number of new teacher.

Table 2 shows a summary of pupil-facility/material ratio in the two districts

S/N	Facility/Material	Obtaining Ratios	Normal Ratio
1	Classroom :Pupil ratio	1: 175	1: 40
2	Teacher :Pupil ratio	1: 80	1: 40
3	Desk :Pupil ratio	1: 3	1: 2
4	Toilet pan :Pupil ratio	1: 76	1: 25
5	English Text book :Pupil ratio	1:3	1: 1
6	Maths text book :Pupil ratio	1:3	1: 1
7	Science text book :Pupil ratio	1:4	1: 1
8	Computer :Pupil ratio	1: 4	1: 1

SOURCE: Field data

Table 2 shows pupil: facility/resource ratios as prevailing in schools under study. These ratios indicate input facility/ resource variables in the teaching/learning process which to a larger extent determine the likely output, which in this case, not just access to education but quality education.

Impact of Free Education on the access to higher education.

Officers from the registrars' offices of individual higher learning institutions reported that with the introduction of free secondary education, enrolment levels for 2023 academic year have improved in institutions of higher learning. They also confirmed that a good number of students has managed settle their outstanding tuition fee arrears. This, according to some parents, is attributed to the savings parents made from free education.

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V. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

A. Discussion

This paper examined the impacts of free Education policy on the delivery of quality education in selected schools of Livingstone and Kazungula districts. The study revealed that a combination of various factors, emanating from free education, have a likelihood of affecting the provision of quality education. Basing our discussion on stakeholders views, we can point out without any fear of being biased, that the aspect of free education should not just concern the abolition of school fees but it must take into consideration the wide range of household costs of schooling such as those which include the costs of school uniforms, health, bedding for the children in boarding schools and for those in private boarding houses. There are also costs of mandatory learning materials such as digital tools (laptops and mobile phones), sports and transport expenses that should also be taken into account.

All these private costs are several times higher than the tuition fees that have been abolished. From the responses by parents in the study areas, it cannot be doubted that free education alone is unlikely to encourage and motivate all children, especially those from poor families, to enrol in school. Parents from lower income communities would rather send their children and orphan dependents to the streets to sell merchandise so as to raise money for food and survival. In such scenarios, free education is not at all an option. This means that unless parents' social-economic needs are considered as integral components of equitable and quality education, free education alone will not attract the poorest of the poor to enrol in school. In order to make free education a success story there is need for the government to fortify and empower underprivileged members of the communities found within school catchment areas through the

Ministry of Small and Medium enterprises Development. [27] (Hambulo 2018)

[28]. In order to meet the targets set in the Sustainable Development Goal number 4 (Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education), there is need to attend to multiple and myriad of factors which work in combination in the school environment Mumba (2002). Therefore, teacher-pupil ratio, book-pupil ratio and availability of enough lavatories and clean and safe water work together to facilitate the attainment of the desired quality education. Any deficit of them or lack of these facilities mentioned, can impact negatively the teaching and learning process.

Schools are also encouraged to supplement government efforts by coming up with strategies to generate funds for the school-owned projects so that they are able to provide free learning equipment and materials that poor children may not afford to buy.

However, the study has also revealed that government has put certain measures in place to make quality education accessible to all children. Government's initiative to introduce free education policy needs to be commended. Working towards the attainment of Sustainable Development Goal number 4, which ensures inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong opportunities for all, the government of Zambia has scored mile stones in making education accessible to all children. As revealed by the study, the provision of bursary schemes through CDF is a right step towards paying boarding fees for children from poor families. Another measure government has put in place to improve the pupil-teacher ratio is the recruitment of more than 30,000 teachers in 2022. The study has also revealed that if the termly allocation of funds to schools continues coming in time and consistently, there is a likelihood of improving the pupil-book ratio, pupil-desk ratio and pupil-computer ratio. Free education will enable parents to make savings for their children's tertiary education. So the trickledown effect of free education is that there is a likelihood that more students are likely to access tertiary education once they have completed their secondary education. Further still, in order to increase access to tertiary education, government of the republic of Zambia has also increased to allocation for bursaries for the most disadvantaged

students to have access to tertiary education, though not all are captured under this scheme.

The other challenge of free education and access to tertiary education is that tertiary institutions have not expanded to accommodate the growing numbers of grade twelve school leavers as a result of free education despite them having the required entry qualifications. Institutions such as defence and security are currently overwhelmed with the demand from prospective applicants wishing to join the sector because of surety of employment upon completion of training.

Meeting the financial demands of tertiary education to most students has been a major challenge amongst other challenges such as inadequate accommodation and classroom spaces as a result of high enrolment levels because of free education.

The recent deployment of 31000 teachers and 11000 health workers has changed the enrolment levels in teacher training institutions. The numbers of the will be teachers applying is on the increase due to the fact that students are now certain of being employed by government upon completion of their training. However this increase comes with its own challenges in terms of spaces available. So there is need for tertiary institutions to expand in order to absorb the high numbers of school leavers as a result of free education.

B. Conclusion

This study has brought to the fore the impact of the Free education policy on the provision of quality education and access to higher education. A lot of teething issues related to free education have been highlighted and challenges that will affect institutions of higher education due to over enrolment in schools have been revealed. The study has also revealed that government is putting mitigation mentions to resolve these challenges. In a nutshell, measures taken by government to remove financial obstacles to access quality education for all children and provide financial support to all public schools need to be applauded.

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