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## Challenges in the implementation of free education policy in Zambia: A case of 4 Primary schools in Mandevu compound of Lusaka district

**Lufeyo Chitondo, Stanley Kalasa and Lemy Chinyundo**

### Abstract

Education determines and improves one's knowledge, skills, develops personality and attitude thus is essential in helping to grow and develop the society. Therefore, the study aimed at assessing the challenges of Government policy of free Primary education. The study employed a mixed paradigm and descriptive survey design that sampled four primary schools, Head teachers, teachers, PTA executive members, parents and Education standard officers. Data was obtained from respondents by means of interviews, questionnaires and classroom observation schedules. Frequency, percentages, tables, graphs and pie-charts were used to analyze the quantitative and qualitative data obtained. Data was then analyzed by the use of software MS Access and MS Excel. The findings revealed high enrolments in primary schools which had brought about a number of challenges such as inadequate educational supplies, low staffing levels, inadequate classrooms and desks. Further, the study recommended that the Ministry of education should evaluate the practicality and sustainability of the free primary education in all primary schools.

**Keywords:** Challenges, free education, implementation, policy, primary school

### Introduction

Before independence in 1964, the situation in education then allowed for the existence of a parallel system of education justified on ratio and other lines according to the policy of the United National Independent Party (UNIP). However, the civil society of poverty reduction (2005) argued that in 1965, the new Zambian government proclaimed the policy to reverse the many years of injustice imposed on the Africans through education fees and other levies they could hardly afford. It further claimed that the education act of 1966 legalized the changes from "fee-paying or non-fee paying" in order to help many Zambians to have access to education easily. This was so in order to support the free education policy as the government abolished ratio schools in 1966 with the aim desegregating the education system further. From the time of its inception in 1964, the free education policy worked well and it advanced and accelerated educational development. Through the policy, the government ensured that all the schools were well stocked with educational supplies. These included exercise books, text books, pens, pencils rulers, mathematical instruments, science kit, art, music, physical materials and all other needed materials and equipment.

By 1986 a change in policy was evidence as boarding and examination fees were re-introduced according to the interim national development plan. This was justified on the premise that parents needed to be involved in the education of their children through cost sharing. The numbers of out of school children increased towards the end of 1990s, but without sustainable signs of government interventions. Eventually this became a crisis and communities took it up themselves to find interventions that would assist their children, hence there emerged community schools which were characterized by low fees, relevant skills, community participation, increased access to education provision of relevant knowledge as well as the focus on vulnerable children.

In 1990, the Government of the Republic of Zambia through the Ministry of Education brought out the fact that the Zambia education policy had gone through several shifts that had seen it move through community, non-governmental organizations, private sector, international donor support and government provision and indicated that a combination of different modes had however been predominant.

At the 1990 world conference on education in Jomtien, delegates from 155 countries including Zambia agreed to universal primary education which was to be accessible to all children and in turn massively reduce illiterate before the end of the decade. The world Declaration on Education for all, adopted at this conference on Education for all was held in March 1991 to prepare strategies and set goals for Education on girls, children in difficult circumstances and for ethnic minorities that did not have the means to accessing education. The national conference set targets on how to achieve universal primary education before 2015. Children everywhere, boys and girls alike were to be given the opportunity to complete a full primary course. The National conference on Education for All resulted in 1996 education policy document which stressed the importance of giving special focus on decentralization of the educational system, accountability and cost sharing (MoE, 1996) and (Kelly, 1999).

To reaffirm its commitment to achieving these goals, the Zambian government through Ministry of Education, on 15<sup>th</sup> March 2002, announced the free education policy, which applied to grades 1-7 of the formal school's stem. In terms of justification, one section of the policy circular stated that: 'the announcement was seen in the context of unprecedented decline in enrolment rates and increasing dropout rates even after those years of the basic education sub-sector investment program whose objectives were to increase enrolment and improve learning achievement' (UNDP 2003:15). With the free education policy pronouncement, the Ministry of education had committed itself to supporting all the schools in the country through grants of about \$500 per term, through funding of basic education sector fund. The funds were meant to support the free education policy and school feeding program commenced in January 2003 while in the after math of the food-crisis of 2002, it was felt that urban population were as much affected by food insecurity as the rural population, hence the urban extension of this intervention. The project targeted both the community schools and centers that catered for street and vulnerable children. In addition, in 2003 all community school coordinators were trained in the various aspects of managing school feeding programs ranging from community mobilization strategies, food preparation and handling hygiene issues as well as writing report skills.

### 1.1 Statement of the problem

Even though educational policy was well intended and had resulted in increased enrolments from Grades 1-7 since its inception, there were still a lot of challenges that had been recorded in the implementation of the policy. For example, primary education, had continued to record higher dropout's rates at grade 7 for girls at 11.6 percent and 10.8 percent of boys (MOE, 2014). Overall, the repetition rate of boys was higher than girls and this had made those who fail drop out of school completely. Despite the increase in enrolment to education at primary school level, there seem to be conflicts that aroused between learner's access to education and supply of quality education in primary schools.

### 1.2 Purpose of the study

The purpose of this study was to assess the challenges Primary schools faced in the implementation of free education policy in Zambia

### 1.3 Research objectives

1. To investigate the extent to which the free primary education policy was effectively being implemented in primary schools.
2. To assess the challenges primary schools face in the implementation of free education policy.
3. To establish measures primary schools had put in place to manage the children's access to primary education and the provision of quality primary education.

### 1.4 Theoretical Framework

The study was guided by Emile Durkheim's theory (1893) of functionalism which looks at education as serving the needs of society. Horace Mawn (1830) advocated for the creation of public schools that would be universally available to all children free of charge and funded by the state. Hence, Primary education is fundamentally guaranteeing everyone has access to education and thereby enable every citizen to become a functional member of society.

### 1.5 Significance of the study

The study shall help to identify certain challenges that have arisen in the implementation of free education policy as well as help to show the distinction that has been created between the children's access to education and provision of quality education in primary schools in Zambia. The study shall benefit the learners at primary schools in Zambia, the policy makers, education administrators and curriculum specialists in that it shall encourage the policy makers through the Ministry of education to think of elevating, analyzing and reviewing the free primary education policy within the framework of national development.

## 2. Literature review

### 2.1 International conventions on Free Education policy

The European Convention on Human Rights had been understood to establish an entitlement to education. According to the International Covenant 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. (Belter and Dieter 2005:31) 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. "

(Siaciwena and Lubinda, 2008) <sup>[38]</sup> argued 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 rooted in the November 1948 declaration of human rights where members of the United Nations declared the right to education for all people worldwide and the aspect of investment in primary education has been a key element in the development process. (Knight and Sabot 1990) <sup>[20]</sup>, established that "primary education improved the earnings of its graduates by 19 percent in Kenya and 13 percent in Tanzania." In such a process, there is always apparent social benefit that accrues from primary schooling, which includes reduced fertility, better health care and

decreased child mortality. Due to social benefits of primary education, most countries worldwide have prioritized primary education. In the United States of America (USA) elementary schooling is free and compulsory to all children (World Education Services, 2004). In India, the Central government provides 80 percent of the budget to finance Free Primary Education, while the local states implement and provide the rest of financing (Government of India, 1994).

### 2.1.1 Negative Impact of User Fees on School Enrolment

A wide body of evidence shows that the costs of schooling inhibit school enrolment. 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 (Saroso, 2005; Yardley, 2005; Pacific News, 2005) [37]. In 2001, parents and teachers in Tanzania observed that non-payment of fees was the principal reason why children did not attend school (Oxfam, 2001). 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 (Tembo and Ndhlovu 2020).

However, there are few empirical studies on the ways in which user fees impact enrolment. In Kenya, absenteeism and drop-out rates have been shown to rise and fall in line with user fees (Mukudi, 2020). 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. An econometric analysis of the impacts of Uganda's Universal Primary Education (UPE) Policy showed that parental income became a less important determinant of enrollment after school fees were eliminated (Deininger, 2003) [8]. In 1992, the proportion of children in Uganda who were not enrolled in school due to costs related to schooling was estimated at 71 percent. After direct fees were eliminated this figure dropped to 37 percent.

Additionally, the global survey results on the impediments of user fees have helped policy makers to understand their effect (user fees) of limiting education opportunities for the poor. The survey conducted by the World Bank and published in 2004, showed that user fees were burdensome to poor families in countries experiencing slow economic growth and inflation (Kattan, 2006) [18]. Prior to the above survey, the study under the United Nations Project "Task Force on Education and Gender equality" revealed that the support by donors to ensure quality basic education was not adequate in Africa. According to (Kaulule 2006), "there were more than 100 million children out of school in Africa that time." Therefore, the study made recommendations of alleviating the problem, which included interventions and actions such as removing school fees.

In support of this move, the School Fee Abolition Initiative was launched by UNICEF and the World Bank in 2005 which grew in a partnership between government representatives, agency partners, and research and academic institutions (Nielsen, 2009) [33]. This was to re-emphasize the Jomtien 1990, Dakar 2000 and other educational conferences which insisted on Education for All by 2015. The focus was exclusively on the elimination of basic education fees because it was at that level that the Education for All movement had declared that education was to be free (World Bank and UNICEF, 2009). The basic or primary level was also the only level at which most governments'

constitution pledged to provide state-sponsored schooling due to the reasons stated above.

### 2.2 Education for All initiative

To reinforce EFA, (Nielsen 2009) [33] stated that in 2002, the World Bank and UNICEF, together with development partners launched the Education for All Fast Track Initiative to help low-income countries in their efforts to meet the education related MDGS and the EFA goal that all children complete a full cycle of basic education by 2015. By 2005, 32 countries joined the School Fee Abolition Movement. These included 19 from Africa, 5 from Europe/Central Asia, 4 from Asia, 3 from Latin America and 1 from Middle East/North America (Nielsen, 2009) [33]. Some of the countries mentioned are Central African Republic, Haiti, Nepal, Saotome, Norway, France, Sweden, Denmark, Brazil, Finland, Belgium and Austria (Kaulule, 2006). Others that moved earlier on to eliminate school fees include Ethiopia, Ghana, Honduras, Kenya, Malawi, Mozambique and Uganda (Kattan, 2006) [18]. Most of the middle income countries especially those from Europe provided free education for children at the age of three and almost 100 percent of children enroll in school (Kaulule, 2006). However, at a global level, there was an overall recognition that elimination of basic school fees must be carefully planned and widely negotiated if it is to make a positive and sustainable impact on access to schooling and improved student teaching (Das *et al*, 2004). Therefore, the school fee abolition is a complex undertaking that cannot be done well without careful planning and policy adjustments on multiple fronts (Chukwumelum, 2007) [6].

### 2.3 Free Primary/Basic Education in Sub-Saharan Africa.

Over the past decade several countries in Sub-Saharan Africa had abolished Primary School tuition fees as part of renewed attempts to resurrect their education systems which had been in decline, and even suffering reduced enrollments after the initial growth following independence (Verspoor, 2006). Whereas from the eighties and early to mid-nineties, cost-sharing had been a policy promoted by international financial institutions such as the World Bank, the direct and indirect costs to parents of their children's education became obstacles to their attendance and continued enrollment. The inability of parents to afford such costs fell on girls disproportionately, typically being the first to be pulled out or allowed to drop out of school (UNESCO, 2003b).

Although, the FPE was introduced with the good intentions of increasing access to education, a number of African countries had had problems regarding financing of the program. These include Malawi, Uganda and Zambia due to declining economies. The FPE Policy had enhanced access to education provision leading to an increase in enrollment of pupils while bringing about decline in quality of education while it is good that enrollment increased in schools. For example, the enrollment increased from 2.7 million to 7.5 million that had defied the reality because teachers were unable to cope with the big numbers. Hence, the compromised on the quality of education provision (UNESCO, 2004b) [40]. It had been argued that before the introduction of FPE, it was easier to have individual pupil attention but that was not the case then (Duncan, Macmillan and Simutanyi, 2003). Additionally, the teaching and learning resources were inadequate due to insufficient

funding. For example, in the Delta State of Nigeria, the intent of the UBE as declared in the policy statement that education it was to be free. The financial burden of government later forced parents to get involved in the funding of basic level of education. Since most of the parents were poor, the children remained poorly equipped to learn (Kamla, 2009).

#### **2.4 Free Education Policy in Zambia**

The then Republican President of Zambia in 2002 announced the introduction of Free Education from grades 1 to 7 with effect from January 2002 and the UPND government also pronounced the implementation of free education policy effective January 2022. The announcement was seen in the context of unprecedented declining enrolment rates and increasing dropout rates even after three years of BESSIP whose objectives were to increase enrolment and improve learning achievement (MoE 2003). There were several factors that were responsible for the enrolment downturn. Among these included the high poverty levels and increased numbers of orphans due to HIV/AIDS which were the main ingredients. The Zambian government had discovered that the extent of exclusion of vulnerable children from the formal education system was quite significant and rising. Therefore, the implementation of free education was seen as the best vehicle for promoting inclusion nationwide and ensuring that no child was denied an opportunity to attend school for failure to meet school costs. The policy stated that; No pupil at grade 1 - 7 was to be levied any user fees including PTA levies. Instead, PTAs may raise funds for specific school projects through raffles and other legitimate means 'after getting clearance from the Provincial Education Officer; No pupil was to be denied enrolment or excluded from school for failure to contribute to PTA fund raising activities; enrolment of pupils was to be unconditional and should not be linked to contributions of items such as cement, reams of paper, slashes etc.; school uniform was not compulsory and no pupil was therefore to be prevented from attending school on account of failure to obtain it. Schools that chose to continue with the uniform requirement were not to commercialize their acquisition by turning this into a fund-raising venture. Uniform should be plain and simple and parents must be allowed to get it from the cheapest source and that teachers were to give remedial teaching as part of their professional responsibility and should therefore not charge children for extra tuition undertaken within the schools (MoE 2003).

It could be seen from the outset that the policy was intended to help vulnerable children to have access to quality education. It was not intended to compromise quality but had both quantity and quality of education. The Child Fund Project research which was conducted in 2015 on school enrolment and drop-out among vulnerable rural Zambian revealed that although Zambian education policies that promoted school attendance had been successful in ensuring enrolment and attendance, there were however challenges that had remained to keep children enrolled until Grade 7. The daily stressors such as excessive chores, looking for pieces of work and worries about school fees were found to be the main predictors of school drop-out. The predominant self-reported reason for school drop-out was a lack of financial means. It therefore seemed insufficient just to pay school fees, as other indirect costs such as books, uniform, etc. still posed a financial barrier for poorer children.

The Zambian Central Statistical Office (ZCSO 2007: 7) stated that "about 17% of primary school age children within the Eastern Province of Zambia did not attend school." It is further argued that in many circumstances the major contributing factor to school drop-out among rural Zambian children ranged from economic and social daily stressors. According to Rise Community Aid Program (RICAP) 2015 report on Zambia Orphan Aid Supported Children (ZOASC) indicated that more than 1300 children in Mandevu compound had dropped out of primary school or could not proceed with education up to grade 7.

#### **2.5 Challenges in the implementation of free primary education policy**

According to International human rights law, primary education is supposed to be compulsory and free of charge as free primary education is fundamental in guaranteeing that everyone has access to education. It is important to note that free education is important as it guarantees some level of education for every pupil in the country and this means that every pupil has an opportunity to reach this level of education at an equal level.

However, schools face numerous challenges in the implementation of free primary school education policy. The main challenges the school administration faced were high pupil enrolment, inadequate teachers and instructional materials (Kalunda 2015). High enrolment rates culminated in teacher shortages, increased workloads for existing teachers, classroom deficits, overcrowding in class, high rate of indiscipline and inadequate teaching and learning materials. In addition, parents had limited awareness towards the importance of education and therefore gave limited community support to education. Also, quest for economic survival of engaging children in survival related ventures impede government's effort to attain free primary education.

Whilst the enrolment expansion had been remarkable, the quality of education as many would say, even the 'value' of education had deteriorated (Kendall, 2003) as among others, inadequate and untimely release of funds to school brought about inadequate teaching and learning materials in schools. The challenges of sustaining UPE was related to the matching of the quantitative expansion with qualitative improvement as well as in improving access to post-primary schooling. The systematic monitoring of various qualitative indicators had underlined many of these challenges, such as reducing pupil teacher ratio, pupil classroom ratio and pupil book ratio. Various measures had been introduced to help qualitative improvement. Teachers' needs were met in some respects through hardship allowances given in remote areas. The policy dilemma of moving toward increased post-primary access whilst still addressing primary quality had remained for some time (Deinger, 2003)<sup>[8]</sup>.

In addition, demand for school places put pressure on limited, inadequate or poor infrastructure while the school management lacked appropriate implementation skills due to lack trained and experienced managers in the implementation of primary education policy. This component of FPE has met with little success as it had been plagued by budget constraints, schools' maintenance expenditure guidelines are not flexible enough to account for individual school needs. lack of proper inspection routines to primary schools by relevant authorities on the

implementation process of the policy and individual schools' inability to account for funds received. Furthermore, lack of research on the needs of schools in terms of teaching staff, infrastructure, teaching and learning materials, desks and so on.

### **3. Research Methodology**

#### **3.1 Research design**

The aim of the study was to assess the challenges Primary schools faced in the implementation of free education policy in Zambia. The study adopted a mixed methods approach which is a combination of quantitative and qualitative data. Exploratory and descriptive designs were as well considered appropriate as they also allowed for more flexible strategies of data collection in order to answer the research questions, (Best and Kahn, 2006). The research design was a descriptive survey, as (Kerlinger in Kombo and Trump, 2006:57) pointed out that "a descriptive study may often result in the formation of important principles of knowledge and solutions to significant problems."

The study employed a mixed paradigm and descriptive survey design that sampled four primary schools, Head teachers, teachers, PTA executive members, parents and Education standard officers. Data was obtained from respondents by means of interviews, questionnaires and classroom observation schedules. Frequency, percentages, tables, graphs and pie-charts were used to analyze the quantitative and qualitative data obtained. Data was then analyzed by the use of software MS Access and MS Excel.

#### **3.2 Research sites**

The study was carried out in the four selected primary schools I Mandevu compound (Mandevu, Mutambe, Justin Kabwe and Kings Parkle) in Lusaka district of Lusaka Province from which respondents were also sampled.

#### **3.3 Population, Sample and Sampling procedure**

The population for the study was purposefully drawn from the four primary schools. Purposive sampling procedure was used to select Head teachers (4), and Education Standards Officers (2) while the simple random sampling procedure was used to select the teachers (40), PTA Executive members (20) and parents (34), (Agesa,2012). The sample size comprised of 100 respondents. Also, the primary data was complimented by the secondary data which was derived from government policy documents, ministerial reports and relevant literature on free primary education.

In the sampling of institutions, the study adopted the stratified cluster random sampling technique. Sampling was done zone by zone. Schools were clustered by zones. One zone was purposively selected based on highest number of schools. The sampling was done at three levels: Sampling zones and schools- level 1, Sampling PTA Executive members and parents 2, Sampling Education Standards Officers, Head teachers and teachers -level 3.

#### **3.4 Data Analysis**

In this research, data was analysed both qualitatively and quantitatively as the questionnaires and semi structured interviews were used as data collection instruments. Thematic approach was used, where data analysis started

with the categorization of themes from the questionnaires and semi structured interviews, Kombo and Tromp (2006). Charts and graphs were used to analyse data. The data gathered was analysed according to the themes of the study and the order of the research objectives. Data generated from the questionnaires and interview guide were analysed manually and also, a combination of software MS Access, SPSS and MS Excel was used to analyse data. Analysis was mainly descriptive, that is, mean, median, mode, range, and standard deviation. Related statistics were applied where possible. Statistical testing took the form of Analysis of Variance (ANOVA), correlation and regression both simple and multiple.

#### **3.5 Ethical Issues**

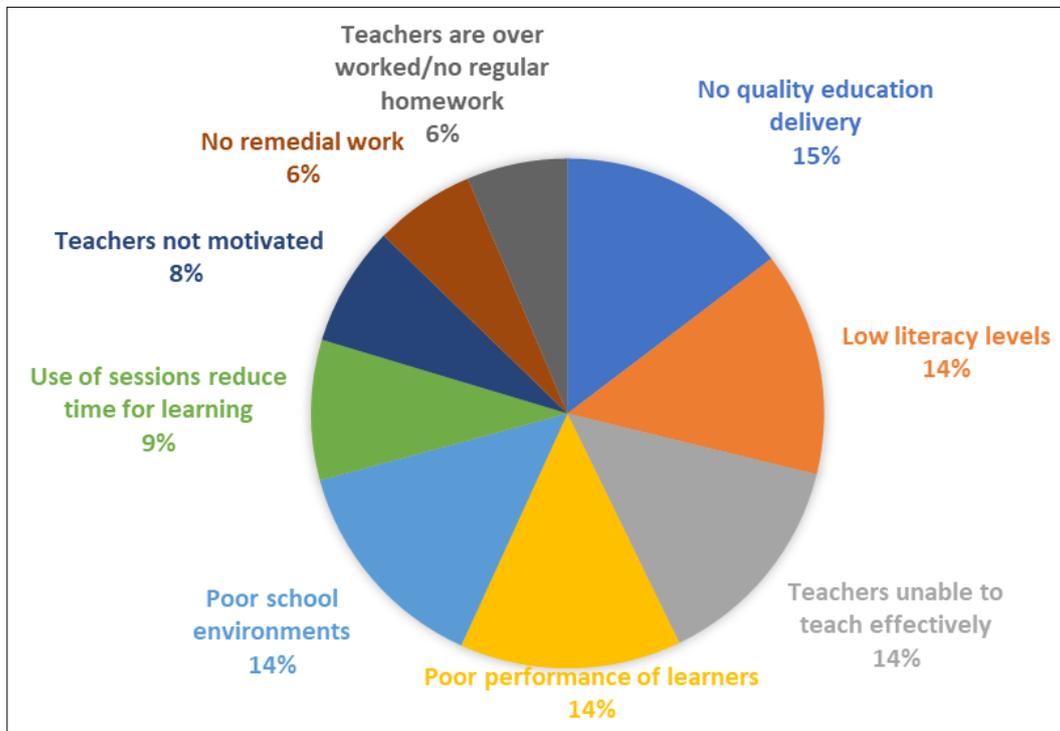
The researcher avoided pressuring respondents to take part in the research. Alternatively, permission consents, assents were obtained from respondents involved in the research and the research topic was strategically selected to ensure that there was no harm whatsoever to the research respondents. In this study, the researcher was fully conscious of the need to abide by the ethical rule of respecting the privacy of individuals taking part in the research. In the same way, all the respondents of the research were to remain unidentified to the public as all their valuable views, opinions and perceptions were only known by the researcher for use only in the research and participant's identities will forever remain hidden.

The Researcher got permission from the District Education Board Secretary to interview Education Standards Officers and Head teachers and from the Head teachers to interview PTA Executive members, parents and teachers. The names of respondents would remain anonymous for the sake of confidentiality, (Bergendahl, Magnusson and Bjork, 2015). However, the identity of respondents was concealed in the thesis but for identification in the thesis, the forty teachers were allocated numbers 1 to 40, the thirty-four parents were allocated ordinal numbers 1<sup>st</sup> to 24<sup>th</sup>, the twenty PTA Executive members were allocated letters A to U, the four Head teachers were allocated primary colours Blue, Black, Green and Red while the two Education Standards Officers were allocated names of famous shanty compounds in Lusaka-Kuku and Kabanana.

### **4. Findings and discussions**

#### **4.1 Implementation of free primary education policy**

On the implementation of free primary education policy, results showed that the policy lacked implementation plan and officers involved in the implementation of free primary education policy were not trained in implementation strategies culminating in poor school enrolment at 14%, teachers unable to teach effectively at 14%, poor quality education delivery at 15% which resulted in low literacy levels at 14% because teachers were unable to teach effectively which led to poor performance of the learners in schools at 14%. Other challenges included; high pupil absenteeism, reduced learning time because teachers attended to several sessions at 9%, lack of teacher motivation at 8%, no remedial work at 6%, teachers being overworked at 6% and could not give enough homework to assess their classes as shown in Figure 2 below.



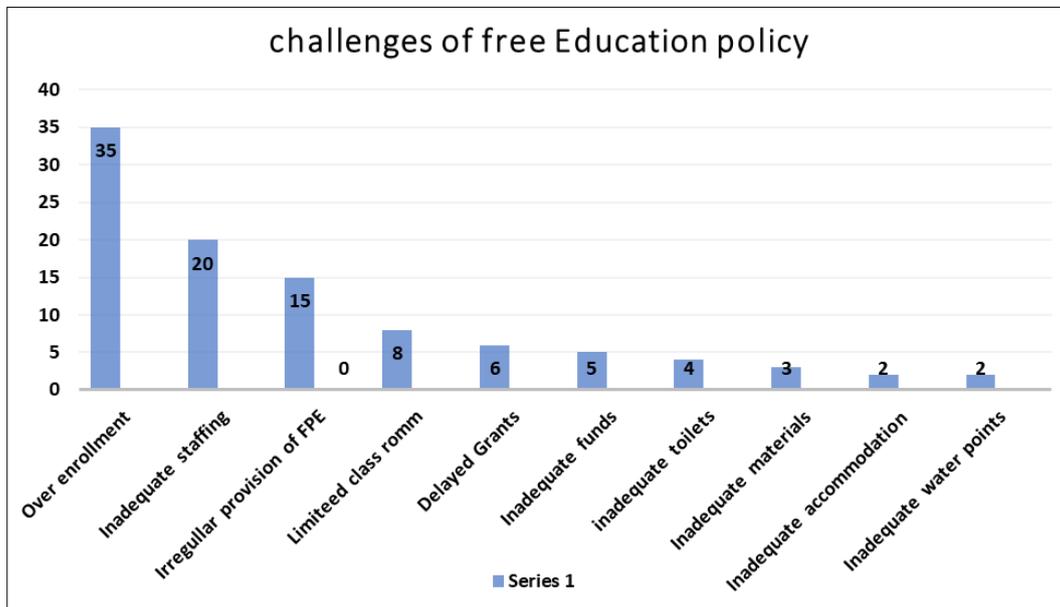
**Fig 1:** Negative results in the implementation of free primary education policy

The Free Primary Education Policy was introduced with good intentions of increasing access to education, the study found that the government through the Ministry of Education did not come up with the implementation plan for the implementation officers who lacked appropriate implementation skills due to lack of trained and experienced managers in the implementation of primary education policy, lack of schools’ maintenance expenditure guidelines, lack of proper inspection routines to primary schools by relevant authorities on the implementation process of the policy and individual schools’ inability to account for funds received (Humble and Farley, 2011) [14]. Furthermore, lack of research on the needs of schools in terms of teaching staff, infrastructure, teaching and learning materials, desks and list of resources necessary for the success of the policy as well as streamlining tasks, promoting efficiency and reducing errors (Fixsen and Blase, 2018) [9]. The implementation lacked plan, goals and steps and implantation timeline for review to determine how effectively the policy was run as well as learn lessons for the future (Brownson *et al*, 2012) [4]. The people on the ground were not trained in the putting of the free primary education policy into action as the purpose of implementation is the

carrying out of planned, intentional activities that aim to turn evidence into and practices that work for the people in the real world (Hall and Hord, 2011).

**4.2 Challenges schools face in implementing free primary education policy**

According to the study results, it revealed that free access to education had brought a number of problems in most primary schools of Mandevu compound of Lusaka district. These problems included absenteeism, large classes, pupils continued to proceed to the following grades while they were still unable to read and write, inadequate teaching staff, high number of pupils who fail during Grade seven examinations, imbalanced education demand and supply of quality, enrolment of over-aged pupils, high dropout rates, and poor water and sanitation. The challenges were over-enrolment at 35%, inadequate staffing at 20%, irregular provision of free primary education (FPE) materials at 15%, limited classroom space at 8%, delayed grants at 6%, inadequate fuds at 5%, inadequate toilets at 4%, inadequate materials at 3% while inadequate accommodation and inadequate water points were at 2% as shown in Figure 2 below.



**Fig 2:** Challenges schools face in implementing free primary education policy

The study showed that school administration faced high challenges in the implementation of free primary education policy. Challenges such as pupil enrolment, inadequate teachers and instructional materials. High enrolment rates culminated in teacher shortages, increased workloads for existing teachers, classroom deficits, overcrowding in class, high rate of indiscipline and inadequate teaching and learning materials. In addition, parents had limited awareness towards the importance of education and therefore give limited community support to education. Also, quest for economic survival of engaging children in survival related ventures impede government’s effort to attain free primary education.

Whilst the enrolment expansion had been remarkable as there has been tremendous increase in children's access to primary education in almost all the schools from the time the policy was introduced in 2002. It was further revealed that enrolment levels had continued increasing at the rate between 6.5% and 7.9% annually. However, inadequate and untimely release of funds to school brought about inadequate teaching and learning materials in schools and such requisites included exercise books, text books, pencils and rulers as well as teaching materials which were essential in teaching and learning. (Deininger, 2003) <sup>[8]</sup>.

In addition, demand for school places put pressure on limited, inadequate or poor infrastructure while the school management lacked appropriate implementation skills due to lack of trained and experienced managers in the

implementation of primary education policy. This component of FPE has met with little success as it had been plagued by budget constraints, schools’ maintenance expenditure guidelines are not flexible enough to account for individual school needs. lack of proper inspection routines to primary schools by relevant authorities on the implementation process of the policy and individual schools' inability to account for funds received. Furthermore, lack of research on the needs of schools in terms of teaching staff, infrastructure, teaching and learning materials, desks and so on.

**4.3 Measures to manage access and provision of quality primary education**

On the measures to manage access and provision of quality primary education of free primary education policy study results showed that Head teachers intensified production unit was the highest at 20%, repaired desks at 13%, emphasized on remedial and home-work policy at 10%, educated parents on the importance of education at 9%, emphasized on CPDs at 8%, introduced sessions in schools at 8%, requested for teachers from government at 7%, used HE and production unit funds at 6%, multi-grade teaching at 6%, used CDF money at 5%, requested for desks from community at 5% and the lowest was built temporary accommodation for teachers at 3%. As shown in Table 1 below.

**Table 1:** Measures put in place to manage access and provision of quality primary education

| Strategies                                      | Actual | Percentage |
|---|--------|------------|
| Intensify production unity                      | 20     | 20         |
| Repaired desks                                  | 13     | 13         |
| Emphasized on remedial work/homework policy     | 10     | 10         |
| Educated parents on the importance of education | 9      | 9          |
| Emphasized on CPDs                              | 8      | 8          |
| Introduced sessions in schools                  | 8      | 8          |
| Requested for teachers from government          | 7      | 7          |
| Used HE and production unit fund                | 6      | 6          |
| Combined classes /multi-grade system involved   | 6      | 6          |
| Used CDF funding                                | 5      | 5          |
| Requested for desks from community              | 5      | 5          |
| Built temporal accommodation for teachers       | 3      | 3          |

The study revealed that there are several strategies that were employed in schools to manage access and provision of quality primary education such as intensification of production units to raise funds for procurement of teaching and learning materials, repair desks as well as to pay community teachers as learning materials significantly increase learners' achievement by supporting learning and a motivated cadre of instructors performs to the best of their abilities. When the Ministry adequately finances the effective running of schools then, Head teachers should spend financial resources largely on the acquisition of learning materials, reduce on pupil-book ratio, pupil-desk ratio as quality education requires the availability and use of educational materials. It should be noted that educational facilities and resources are not available for effective teaching and learning in primary schools and therefore most of the teaching is done theoretically, even for practical due to lack of teaching and learning materials as well as equipment for practical lessons. The Ministry of Education should deploy trained teachers to schools while school administrators embark on CPD sessions human development. Human resource development results in a stronger and more effective workforce as well as being strengthened and more valuable to adult education.

The other strategy to manage access and provision of quality primary education revealed by the study was multi-grade teaching with the use of a variety of teaching methods and techniques in order to cater for a range of learning needs of children and taking into account the availability of local resources. Teachers should as much as possible use methods that promote active learners' participation and interaction and in addition, they should use methods that encourage learners to reflect, think and do rather than reproduce from rote learning and should therefore be advised to use the learner-centred approach in the teaching and learning process as well as engage learners more in practical lessons. Also, there should be acriteria for evaluating performance of individuals and in all the subjects. In addition, school managers introduced sessions in schools to cater for large numbers of learners and used HE and production unit funds as well as CDF funds to build teachers houses to motivate, enhance their health, well-being, social and economic status (Cranton 2002). Monitoring and evaluation is another strategy which can help to enhance the access and provision of quality primary education as monitoring and evaluation improve teaching practices. All school administrators should monitor, evaluate and analyse the effectiveness of free primary education policy and the teaching and learning strategies and then, there should be follow-ups and continuous monitoring and evaluation.

#### **4.4 Negative effects of free primary school education policy on the provision of quality primary education**

On inadequacy in teaching staff and classroom shortages, the study revealed that most schools combined classes and introduced multiple sessions for the purposes of catering for all the children. That had compromised the quality of education provision in that teachers found it difficult to monitor pupils' work and that made it very difficult for head teachers to monitor closely the daily progress and that eventually led to poor performance. These findings were in line with those stated by (Sifuna 2003) on the illusions of UFP education in Kenya. The system of combined classes and multiple sessions did more harm than good in the sense

that time was limited and the amount of work done every day did not guarantee learning having taken place. The subjects on the time-table could not be completed and congestion in the limited classrooms hindered the teachers' ability to teach effectively. These findings were in agreement with those mentioned by (Sweetly 2004) as having been experienced in Indonesia and India. In addition, the study revealed that there were fewer text books and other materials compared to the number of pupils. They had to share books at a ratio of 1:5 and some 1:10 and this made it hard for them to do class exercises effectively and homework on time (Day, 2000) <sup>[7]</sup>.

On the other hand, teaching and learning had definitely been compromised by large classes, shortage of text books and shortage of teachers. It was found out that some teachers handled classes with 60 and 120 pupils. In such circumstances pupils hardly got attention they deserved, hence many were not learning much. Teacher-pupil interaction was minimal and teachers could only move with faster learners leaving out the slow learners.

Some pupils, especially the over-aged, who entered school due to free education policy, some of whom had been expelled for disciplinary reasons were back in school and were reportedly transmitting negative influences from the world outside of school like smoking cigarettes, chewing bubble gum or sniffing glue. Bad vices like bullying, rowdy behavior, fighting, rudeness, harassment, defying teachers and refusing to do assignments were among the problems of the over-aged pupils (Humble and Farley, 2011) <sup>[14]</sup>. Education Standards Officers from the District Education Office did not regularly schools to monitor teaching and learning as well as the implementation of free primary education The study revealed that due to limited resources, only very few schools were visited per quarter meaning that most schools were not visited for the whole year. These findings were in conformity with those stated by (Obinaju 2001) on the coping strategies on challenges of implementing free education policies in most African countries.

#### **5. Conclusion**

Free Primary Education policy was being implemented in Mandevu compound of Lusaka district as government had continued to give all the primary school grants and other teaching and learning requisites like books, rulers and pencils as well as buy or repair desks and deploy teachers to support the Free Primary Education policy and the results show that the enrolment figures had continued to rise rapidly from the time of pronouncement which led to overcrowding in classes. That encouraged many learners more especially those from vulnerable family to have access to education.

The higher enrolments created a conflict between access and delivery of quality education. There were challenges of government providing more teachers, more classrooms, more text books, more desks, more toilets, enough clean water, more free exercise books and other educational materials to meet the increased enrolment. When educational materials were provided, they were irregular and inadequate. The implementation of the FPE policy was characterized by inadequate and erratic funding from the government. The schools' environments were uncondusive for teaching and learning purposes as most of the schools had over stretched facilities like classrooms which were

congested with pupils squeezing on few available desks and text books and other learning materials compared to the number of learners. Teachers handled more learners in congested classes to the extent that slow learners were not taken care of. Furthermore, there were inadequate teaching staff which forced schools to combine classes and these impacted negatively on the quality of education delivery in primary schools.

To cope with the challenges, the schools had to come up with some strategies such as production units, combining classes, introducing sessions, making new desks and repair of old ones, educating parents on the importance of education, including involving parents in the school infrastructure development, use of CDF money and use Continuing Teacher Development (CPDs), sending teachers for further training, close monitoring of work done on a daily basis and continuing lobbying for teachers from government.

## 6. Recommendations

Based on the study findings, the following recommendations were suggested to support the effective implementation of Free Primary Education:

- I) The government should evaluate the practicality and sustainability of the Free Primary Education in all primary schools in Zambia as this may help to mitigate some of the challenges school managers face.
- II) Additional funds should be allocated for needy schools to enable them put up infrastructure and plan and purchase adequate school requisites and the disbursement of such funds should be sent to schools on time preferably during holidays so that schools could plan in time.
- III) iii). The government through the Ministry of Education should conduct research on the needs of schools in terms of teaching staff, infrastructure, teaching and learning materials, desks and list of resources necessary for the success of the policy as well as streamlining tasks, promoting efficiency and reducing errors
- IV) iv). All school administrators should monitor, evaluate and analyse the effectiveness of free primary education policy and the teaching and learning strategies and then, there should be follow-ups and continuous monitoring and evaluation of the policy.
- V) v). The Ministry of Education school come up with proper inspection routines to primary schools by education standards department on the implementation process of the policy and individual schools' inability to account for funds received.
- VI) vi). The Ministry of Education should come up with implementation plan and officers involved in the implementation of free primary education policy should be trained in implementation strategies so as to enhance quality education provision.

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