



# **The Study on the Impact of Free Education Policy on Chadiza Boarding Secondary and Chadiza Primary School**

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Development of Aid from People to People

Education is a cornerstone of social and economic development. Recognizing this, Zambia introduced the Free Education Policy to enhance access to primary and secondary education. The policy aims to eliminate financial barriers, ensuring that all children, particularly those from marginalized backgrounds, can enroll and complete their education. However, while the policy has led to a significant increase in enrollment, concerns have emerged regarding the quality of education, resource availability, and sustainability.

This article examines the impact of the Free Education Policy on Chadiza Boarding Secondary School and Chadiza Primary School. It explores the changes in enrollment and retention rates, the effects on education quality, and the challenges schools face in implementing the policy. The findings contribute to discussions on how best to optimize free education for sustainable development.

## **2. Evolution of Free Education Policy in Zambia**

### **2.1. Pre-Independence and Early Post-Independence Education System**

During Zambia's colonial era, access to education was limited, particularly for indigenous populations. The formal education system primarily served European settlers, leaving many Zambians with little to no educational opportunities. After independence in 1964, the government prioritized expanding education, introducing policies to increase school enrollment and improve literacy rates.

### **2.2. Introduction of Cost-Sharing Measures**

By the 1980s and 1990s, economic challenges forced the government to introduce cost-sharing measures in education. Parents had to pay school fees and buy uniforms, textbooks, and other learning materials. Unfortunately, these financial burdens disproportionately affected rural and low-income families, leading to increased dropout rates, especially among girls.

### **2.3. Reintroduction of Free Education**

The Zambian government reintroduced free primary education in the early 2000s and extended it to secondary education in 2022 to remove financial barriers and improve literacy rates. The policy abolished tuition fees, PTA levies, and examination fees, allowing children from low-income families to access education. This initiative aimed to increase enrollment, reduce dropout rates, and promote gender equity in education.

### **Impact of the Free Education Policy**

- ❖ **Increased Enrollment:** Chadiza Primary School recorded a 45% rise in student enrollment, while Chadiza Boarding Secondary saw a 40% increase, particularly among girls and disadvantaged children.
- ❖ **Higher Retention Rates:** More students remained in school, especially in Grades 7–12, as financial constraints were no longer a barrier.

### **Challenges in Implementation**

- ❖ Despite its success, the policy introduced several challenges:

#### **1. Overcrowded Classrooms:**

- ❖ Class sizes rose from 40 to over 60–80 students per teacher, straining learning conditions.
- ❖ Limited classroom space forced some lessons to be conducted outdoors.

#### **2. Teacher Shortages:**

- Insufficient recruitment led to increased workloads for existing teachers.
- Rural schools struggle to attract teachers due to poor housing and salaries.

### 3. Inadequate Learning Materials:

- Textbooks are shared among five or more students, limiting individual study.
- Shortages in science and mathematics materials affect exam performance.
- While free education has improved access, addressing overcrowding, teacher shortages, and resource limitations is essential for sustaining quality education in Chadiza schools.

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## 3. Enrollment and Retention Trends at Chadiza Boarding Secondary and Chadiza Primary School

### 3.1. Surge in Student Enrollment

Following the introduction of the Free Education Policy, Chadiza Boarding Secondary and Chadiza Primary School experienced a dramatic increase in student enrollment. Data from school records indicate that:

- Primary school enrollment increased by 45% between 2020 and 2023.
- Secondary school enrollment grew by 38% in the same period.
- The number of female students increased, narrowing the gender gap in school attendance.

### 3.2. Impact on Student Retention

While more students are enrolling, retention remains a challenge. Many students drop out due to:

- Long distances to school, particularly in rural areas.
  - Household financial constraints, as families still struggle with indirect costs such as transportation, uniforms, and school supplies.
  - Early marriages and child labor, which disproportionately affect female students.
- ❖ A study conducted by the Ministry of Education in 2023 found that dropout rates in rural secondary schools remained at 23%, despite the elimination of school fees.

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## 4. Quality of Education Under the Free Education Policy

The Free Education Policy in Zambia has undoubtedly increased access to education, but this has come at a cost—a decline in the quality of education due to overcrowding, inadequate infrastructure, shortages of learning materials, and strained teacher resources. At Chadiza Boarding Secondary and Chadiza Primary School, these challenges have directly affected learning outcomes and the overall effectiveness of education delivery.

### 4.1. Overcrowding and Infrastructure Challenges

The surge in student enrollment following the Free Education Policy has put immense pressure on existing school infrastructure. Many schools, including Chadiza Boarding Secondary and Chadiza Primary, lack adequate facilities to accommodate the growing student population.

#### Key Issues Arising from Overcrowding

##### 1. High Student-Teacher Ratios

- In Chadiza Primary School, classrooms now accommodate over 60 students per teacher, far exceeding the recommended ratio of 40:1 (MoGE, 2022).
- Teachers struggle to provide individualized attention, reducing student engagement and overall academic performance.

##### 2. Shortage of Desks and Chairs

- Many students sit on the floor or share desks, creating discomfort and distraction in learning.
- The shortage of proper furniture also affects writing posture and concentration, leading to poor handwriting and slower comprehension rates.

##### 3. Inadequate Classrooms and Learning Spaces

- Due to limited classroom space, some lessons are conducted outdoors, exposing students to harsh weather conditions.

- II. Schools lack libraries and laboratories, making it difficult for students to access research materials and conduct practical experiments.

#### 4. Strained Sanitation Facilities

- i. Chadiza Boarding Secondary has insufficient toilets, forcing students to share limited facilities, which poses health risks (Mulenga & Kabombwe, 2021).
- ii. Water shortages in some areas worsen hygiene conditions, increasing the risk of waterborne diseases.

#### 5. Increased Class Disruptions

- i. The high number of students in classrooms leads to excessive noise levels, making it difficult for teachers to maintain discipline.
- ii. Lack of proper ventilation due to overcrowding results in poor air quality, contributing to fatigue and reduced concentration among students.

#### 4.2. Shortage of Qualified Teachers and Heavy Workloads

Despite the increase in student numbers, the recruitment of teachers has not kept pace. This imbalance has led to severe teacher shortages, particularly in rural schools like Chadiza Boarding Secondary and Chadiza Primary.

##### Challenges Affecting Teachers

##### 1. Excessive Workloads

- ❖ Teachers handle multiple classes, making it difficult to provide personalized instruction or assess students effectively.
- ❖ Increased administrative duties (e.g., handling larger class records and discipline management) reduce the time teachers spend on lesson planning and instructional delivery.

##### 2. Limited Teacher Training and Professional Development

- ❖ With the rapid increase in student numbers, many newly recruited teachers lack the training necessary to handle large class sizes effectively.
- ❖ Limited opportunities for further education and skill development have resulted in teaching methods becoming outdated.

##### 3. High Teacher Turnover

- ❖ The lack of incentives for teachers in rural areas has resulted in high turnover rates, with many preferring to work in urban schools with better facilities.
- ❖ Poor housing conditions for teachers in Chadiza contribute to low morale and job dissatisfaction.

#### 4.3. Inadequate Learning Materials and Teaching Aids

Despite the government's efforts to provide free textbooks and other resources, Chadiza schools still face a severe shortage of learning materials.

##### Key Issues

##### 1. Textbook Shortages

- Many students share one textbook among five or more learners, affecting homework completion and self-study.
- Subjects like science and mathematics require specialized textbooks, but only 60% of students at Chadiza Primary have access to these resources (MoGE, 2022).

##### 2. Lack of Laboratory Equipment and ICT Resources

- Science subjects suffer the most as there is limited access to lab equipment for practical lessons.
- No access to computers or digital learning tools, making it difficult for students to acquire ICT skills that are essential for modern education and employment.

##### 3. Inadequate Teaching Aids

- Many classrooms lack visual learning aids, such as charts, maps, and multimedia projectors, which are essential for interactive learning.
- Teachers often rely on outdated teaching materials, affecting the relevance of lessons to modern educational standards.

#### 4.4. Impact on Student Performance and National Examination Results

- The combination of overcrowded classrooms, teacher shortages, and limited resources has negatively affected student learning outcomes.

- National Examination Results at Chadiza Schools

### 1. Decline in Pass Rates

- Examination results indicate that student performance has declined by 5% over the past five years, particularly in subjects like mathematics, science, and English (Mubanga, 2020).
- The decline in pass rates reflects difficulties in preparing students adequately for exams due to overcrowding and lack of individual teacher attention.

### 2. Increase in Student Repetition Rates

- Many students repeat grades due to poor performance, overburdening teachers and school resources further.

### 3. Higher Dropout Rates Among Low-Performing Students

- Students who struggle academically are more likely to drop out, particularly those who lack parental support or face economic challenges.

## 4.5. Psychological and Social Effects of Overcrowding

The challenges in the education system do not only affect academics—they also have long-term psychological and social impacts on students.

Effects on Students

### 1. Increased Stress and Anxiety

- ❖ Large class sizes and inadequate teacher support increase student anxiety, particularly before exams.
- ❖ Lack of personal attention makes it difficult for struggling students to receive guidance and motivation.

### 2. Disruptive Classroom Behavior

- ❖ Overcrowding reduces discipline control, leading to increased distractions and peer conflicts.
- ❖ Boredom and lack of engagement result in some students losing interest in learning.

### 3. Low Self-Esteem and Academic Frustration

- ❖ Students who struggle to keep up with lessons develop low self-confidence, making them less likely to participate in class.

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## 5. Socioeconomic Implications of Free Education

### 5.1. Reduction in Household Financial Burdens

The Free Education Policy has relieved many families of tuition expenses, allowing them to allocate more resources to food, healthcare, and other basic needs. However, hidden costs such as school supplies, transportation, and uniforms still pose challenges for low-income families.

### 5.2. Impact on Gender Parity

- ★ The policy has significantly improved school attendance among girls. Previously, many parents prioritized boys' education due to financial constraints. With the removal of school fees, more girls are now enrolling and staying in school longer.

### 5.3. Community Perceptions of Free Education

- ★ While the policy has been widely praised, some parents and educators believe that it has compromised the quality of education due to the lack of sufficient resources. There is growing concern that merely increasing access without addressing quality could lead to poor learning outcomes and lower literacy levels.

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## 6. Challenges in Implementing Free Education at Chadiza Schools

### 6.1. Funding Constraints

Despite the government's commitment to free education, funding remains inadequate to meet the growing demand for resources. Schools often struggle to pay for electricity, internet, and administrative expenses due to budget shortfalls.

### 6.2. Weak Monitoring and Evaluation Mechanisms

There is a lack of proper systems to track the policy's implementation. Many schools lack official data on student performance, dropout rates, and infrastructure needs.

### 6.3. Increased Pressure on Teachers

Teachers are overburdened with large class sizes and administrative duties. Many report low morale due to heavy workloads, poor working conditions, and delayed salary increments.

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## Recommendations for Improving Educational Quality

To address these challenges, several key policy interventions should be prioritized by the government and other stakeholders.

### Infrastructure Expansion

1. Construct more classrooms to reduce overcrowding and ensure a better learning environment.
2. Improve school sanitation facilities by adding toilets and clean water sources to prevent health risks.
3. Provide adequate desks, chairs, and textbooks to improve student comfort and engagement

### Recruitment and Retention of Teachers

1. Hire more teachers to reduce student-teacher ratios.
2. Provide better salaries, rural allowances, and housing incentives to attract and retain teachers in remote areas.

### Increase Access to Learning Materials

1. Improve distribution of textbooks, laboratory equipment, and ICT tools to enhance student learning experiences.
2. Introduce school libraries and digital learning resources to support independent study.

### Strengthening School Management and Community Involvement

1. Encourage parent-teacher associations (PTAs) to take an active role in school decision-making.
2. Mobilize local businesses and NGOs to support infrastructure development and scholarships.

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## Conclusion

The Free Education Policy has successfully increased school enrollment, but infrastructural deficits, teacher shortages, and resource limitations have led to a decline in educational quality. Schools like Chadiza Boarding Secondary and Chadiza Primary face significant challenges, which need urgent interventions to sustain long-term educational success. By investing in infrastructure, teacher recruitment, and resource distribution, Zambia can maximize the benefits of free education and ensure that students receive a high-quality learning experience.

To ensure long-term success, policymakers must balance access and quality, ensuring that every child not only attends school but also receives a meaningful education that prepares them for future opportunities.

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