



Free Education Policy and Quality Education: A Case Study of Kasama District of Northern Province, Zambia

Martina Musonda Chomba¹, Neroh H. Mwanapabu², Chanda Chansa Thelma³

Rockview University, Lusaka, Zambia

Corresponding Author: *Martina Musonda Chomba, Kateshi Day Secondary School, P.O Box 410208, Kasama,*

Co-author1: Neroh H. Mwanapabu, Department of Education

Co-author2: Chanda Chansa Thelma, Department of Humanities and Social Sciences Education

Abstract: *Education is believed to be a cornerstone in alleviating poverty and as such international communities as well as governments have advocated for free education for all. In line with the aspirations to accord education access to all children in Zambia, the current government administration pronounced the free education policy which targets children from primary to secondary level. In view of this, the purpose of the study was to analyze the effect of free education policy on provision of quality education in Kasama district of Northern Province in Zambia. The study employed a mixed method approach in which both qualitative and quantitative methods of data collection and analysis were used. A case study descriptive research design was used in the study in which primary data was collected from education standard officers, head teachers, teachers and learners using interviews, semi-structured questionnaire and focus group discussion. Microsoft excel was used as a data analysis in which data was analyzed thematically and descriptively. Findings were presented using frequency tables, figures, graphs, pie-charts and text narration. The findings revealed that funding and teaching and learning materials under free education policy were inadequate, which in turn negatively affected the provision of quality education in Kasama district. The study further revealed that class size under free education policy had become large thereby increasing the number of pupils per class and subsequent teacher-pupil ratio. The findings revealed that majority of the teachers had more than 3 streams of classes and had more than 50 pupils per class. The large class size as a result of increased enrolment under free education negatively affects provision of quality education according to the findings. The study concludes that free education policy negatively affects provision of quality education in Kasama district due to inadequate funding, inadequate availability of teaching and learning materials,*

increased class size due to increased enrolment and poor classroom environment due to increased class size. The study therefore recommends that the government should increase the allocation of funding towards free education policy. Increasing funding will result in adequate teaching and learning materials and employment of many teachers, which in turn will result in more schools and classrooms being built and reduction in class size and teacher pupil ratio.

Keywords: Free Education, Implementation, Policy, Provision, Pupil-Ratio and Quality Education.

1. INTRODUCTION

Free education refers to the years or grades during which children and young people are entitled to education which is free of tuition fees (Chanda, 2023). It refers to education funded through government spending or charitable organizations rather than tuition funding (Jackson, 2012). Free Education means that no child, other than a child who has been admitted by his or her parents to a school which is not supported by the appropriate government, shall be liable to pay any kind of fee or charges or expenses which may prevent him or her from pursuing and completing elementary education. Prior to the nineteenth century, systematic investment in human capital was not considered especially important in any country. Expenditures on schooling, on-the-job training, and other similar forms of investment were quite small. This began to change radically during this century with the application of science to the development of new goods and more efficient methods of production, first in Great Britain, and then gradually in other countries (Kattan, 2015). During the twentieth century, education, skills, and the acquisition of knowledge have become crucial determinants of a person's and a nation's productivity (Kamla, 2019). One can even call the twentieth century the "Age of Human Capital" in the sense that the primary determinant of a country's standard of living is how well it succeeds in developing and utilizing the skills and knowledge, and furthering the health and educating the majority of its population.

The past decades have seen extraordinary expansions in access to basic education throughout the developing world (UNICEF, 2019). Many countries are now on the brink of a further increase in access to secondary and higher education and in effecting spectacular improvements in the quality of education offered at all levels (Baker & Smith, 2017). As increasing numbers of students complete their basic education, their demand for education at higher levels is similarly increasing. Educating girls and women is probably the single most effective investment a developing country can make, whether or not women work outside the home. It creates a multitude of positive remunerations for families including better family health and nutrition, improved birth spacing, lower infant and child mortality, and enhanced educational attainment of children (Baker & Smith, 2017). Countries in the developing world are increasingly integrated in world markets for manufactured goods. Their ability to compete in these markets and in globalizing service markets will depend on the excellence of human capital they bring to the competition (Ladd, 2010). Ensuring that all citizens are educated and numerate, that many possess a wide range of problem solving skills beyond the basic level, and that some have world class professional skills will

necessitate improved access to education as well as improved teacher programs, and academic methods that encourage higher order cognitive skills.

No country has achieved constant economic development without considerable investment in human capital. Previous studies have shown handsome returns to various forms of human capital accumulation: basic education, research, training, learning-by-doing and aptitude building (Ibid, 2017). The distribution of education matters. Unequal education tends to have a negative impact on per capita income in most countries. Thus, in order to achieve equal education, countries tend to look to free education provision.

While there are many commonalities, the education systems that are supposed to provide education in the different countries are influenced by settings and circumstances in different contexts. Education policies and practices and thus, also those that provide directives with regard to education provision are, in particular, influenced by local cultural, political, socio-economic, historical, geographical, demographical and religious factors, amongst other things (Shiyumbu, 2018).

Of particular interest in the current paper was the political factors in which government of the day introduces education policies that tend to affect the provision of education to all. Education provision in Zambia dates as far back as the days of the colonial masters when missionaries introduced formal education to native Africans (GRZ, 2011). During the colonial era much of the education provision was controlled by the white leaders (Kelly, 1999). However, with passage of time and attainment of independence in 1964, subsequent governments have introduced various policies on education and educational reforms that have influenced the provision of education in the country.

The latest in the series of reforms is the introduction of free education beyond primary schools. One of the campaign promises of the current ruling party (United Party for National Development (UPND)) was to increase access to education at all levels. Thus, when they formed government in 2021, free education policy was introduced beyond primary schools to include secondary schools (Shamapande, 2022). However, it is not clear how the policy is affecting the provision of quality education. At the 1990 World Conference on Education for All in Jomtien, delegates from 155 countries including Zambia agreed to make primary education accessible to all children and to massively reduce illiteracy before the end of the decade (UNESCO, 2015). The World Declaration on Education for All at this conference, thirty years ago, urged countries to intensify their efforts to meet the basic learning needs of all and to have realized universal access to primary education by 2000. Kelly (1991) further claimed that in Zambia the National Conference on Education for All was held in March 1991 as a follow up to the Jomtien conference. 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 course of primary school (MoE, 1996). The National Conference on Education for All resulted in the formulation of educational policy documents such as Focus on Learning in 1992 and Educating our Future in 1996 which stressed the importance of giving special focus on: decentralization of the educational system, accountability and cost sharing.

To reaffirm its commitment to achieving these goals, the Zambian government through the Ministry of Education, on 15th March 2002, announced the “Free Education Policy”, which applied to grades 1 to 7 of the formal school system for the primary school level (GRZ, 2012). In

terms of justification, one section of the policy circular stated that: “The announcements were 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 Programme (BESSIP) whose objectives were to increase enrolment and improve learning achievement” (MoE 2002). Kaulule (2006) stated that with the free education policy, the Ministry of Education had committed itself to supporting all the schools in the country through grants of about \$500 – \$600 per term, through funding of BESSIP. The funds were meant to support school requisites such as books, chalk, paper, pencils and other teaching and learning inputs. This project was done almost twenty years ago now. One wonders what the situation is like today given that the Ministry of General Education in Zambia still continues with the policy of free primary education despite funding to the education sector having been declining each year that passes since 2015 (Mulenga and Kabombwe, 2019b).

Modern international commitments to free primary education date back nearly 70 years to article 26 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) adopted in 1948. This article states that. ‘Everyone has the right to education. Education shall be free, at least in the elementary and fundamental stages.’ The right to free primary was expanded in 1966 in the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR), with additional provision of progressively free secondary education (Baker & Smith, 2017).

Zambia decided to make education free through the education Act of 1966 which provided for the abolition of tuition fees. The move was made in order to increase access to education. Before independence in October 24, 1964, there was no free education, as pupils were to pay for all school requirements. The United National Independence party (UNIP) government introduced free education. People did not have to pay for anything at any level of education. Students at College and University were given free uniforms, exercise and text books. In addition, pupils were also given food in form of milk and biscuits at school. Apart from that boarding schools were provided beef by the government which was produced from state ranches such as Chishinga and Mbesuma located in Luwingu and Isoka districts respectively. The government was able to provide all these things due to a robust investment in Agriculture and (formation of strong cooperative) and thriving mining sector. The monies made from copper sales benefited the education sector very much. Consequently, attendance in schools increased especially in rural areas. Children in rural areas could manage to access primary and secondary education, and even manage to go to the University of Zambia (Shamapande, 2022).

When the Movement for Multiparty Democracy (MMD) formed government in 1991, school fees were reintroduced in form of user fees. It became difficult for the government to run schools without payments from the recipients of education. This could be attributed to the conditionalities that the MMD government was given by the International Monetary Fund. Some of the conditions included liquidation of government companies such as ZCBC, Cold storage board of Zambia, Namboard, Kalungwishi and UBZ; selling of houses and privatization of companies (Ibid, 2022). However, in 2002, the MMD government under the leadership of President Levy Patrick Mwanawasa reintroduced free primary education. From 2006 to 2010, funding to education sector steadily increased from 2.9% to 3.5% of Gross Domestic Product (GDP). Zambia improved school infrastructure including water and sanitation. Teacher training programmes increased (Shamapande, 2022). After Ghana in 2017 and the Democratic Republic of Congo in 2019, Zambia is the latest country in Africa to abolish school fees at both primary and secondary education levels.

In 2022, the government of the United Party for National Development expanded free education from primary education to secondary education. The 2022 free education policy abolished payment of tuition fees, school registration fees, Parent Teacher Association (PTA) fees and examination fees. The free education policy is not a disastrous policy. Full access to affordable quality education is a social life line, a moral obligation pursued by progressive governments to move their societies into modern times (Moshoeshoe, 2020). The introduction of free education by the government is a pull factor as children, once wallowing in abject poverty, are given an opportunity to get an education.

The international policy community is agog over quality education. For more than two decades, policy attention has been shifting away from issues of access, enrolment and years of schooling completed to issues of learning, skills acquisition and teacher quality. This policy turn has gained steam in recent years for several reasons. First and foremost, most countries in the developing world are effectively attaining universal primary education (UPE), with net primary enrolment ratios greater than 95%, or are on track to do so in the coming years (UIS, 2015). Having reached, or about to reach, UPE, improving the 'quality' of primary education and reducing inequalities in post-primary education are emerging as new issues in national policy agenda. Indeed, Zambia had already universalized access to primary education by the 2002 and, not surprisingly, quality issues became a centerpiece of regional policy discussions.

1.2. Statement of the Problem

According to the Article 26 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), everyone has the right to education. The UDHR further states that education shall be free, at least in the elementary and fundamental stages. As a United Nations (UN) member state, Zambia has ratified many human rights conventions and thus made binding international commitments to adhere to the standards laid in these universal human rights documents. It is as a result of such commitments and good political will that the government revisited the free education policy in 2022 and extended it from primary to secondary education levels. Though the free education policy was introduced over a year ago, debates are still on in various quarters on whether or not, it is possible to provide free education in Zambia without compromising the quality of education. Some of the concerns include whether Zambia has adequate resources for the provision of free education from primary to secondary school (Chanda, 2023). Since inception, some positive results have been noted such as recruitment of 30,000 teachers in 2022, increase in access to education and so on (Ngoma, 2022). Despite these positive results, the questions of inadequacy are still being asked. The teachers are inadequate, teaching and learning materials are not enough, there is shortage of furniture and many other issues. Therefore, this study sought to find out to what extent class size, availability of teaching and learning materials and classroom environment have affected the quality of education under the free education policy in Zambian schools.

1.3. The Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to analyze the effect of free education policy on the provision of good quality education in Zambia using Kasama district in Northern Province as a case study.

1.4. Research Objectives

The objectives of the study were to:

- Determine the extent to which government provides funding to schools under the free education policy in Kasama district.
- Examine how the class size brought about by the free education policy affects the provision of quality education in Kasama district.
- Suggest corrective measures which the government can take to improve teaching and learning under the free education policy in Kasama district.

1.5. Conceptual Framework

Education is the systematic training of individual in order to bring about positive change in his or her behavior so as to become fulfilled citizen. Across the globe, trends in education have reflected significant increase in students' enrolment (Ayieke, 2005). Free education is education funded through government spending or charitable organizations rather than tuition funding. Many models of free higher education have been proposed (Alawattegama, 2020). Primary school and other comprehensive or compulsory education are free in many countries (often not including primary textbook). Tertiary education is also free in certain countries, including post-graduate studies in the Nordic countries. The Article 13 of International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights ensures the right to free education at primary education and progressive introduction of it at secondary and higher education as the right to education (Mutisya, 2011). It is however noted that, the free education policy has its own short comings which may not have had achieved its main objectives. Most schools continue to experience numerous challenges that may hinder delivery of quality education which may lead to continued poor academic performance which may in turn lead underdevelopment in Zambia (Chanda, 2023).

1.6. Significance of the Study

Many stakeholders may profit from the findings of this study, with the introduction of free education policy, it has brought about the help of an individual mind to develop capabilities in contrast, education has also been seen as a way to improve equality. Having access to public education in theory has the potential to reduce poverty and promote equality. For starters, Ministry of Education may be able to understand the standards by which quality education is provided. Keeping this information may enable the ministry of education to find solutions to various issues affecting the implementation of free education policy in Zambia. At the same time, it may also provide information or data needed to understand how the free education policy can be implemented without compromising the quality of education provided. Second, there is the government. The government, via applicable regulators, may get knowledge to assess the effectiveness of free education policy in Zambia. Teachers may also see how the free education is implemented as a whole and strategies being employed to ensure that good quality education are provided under the free education umbrella. The study is a wake-up call to educators to take appropriate measures to ensure that resources allocated to public primary and secondary schools do not only achieve the intend objective of improving access and retention to secondary education, but that they also yield the maximum benefits possible to the students in terms of improved academic performance. The study could also be important to policy makers who may come up with policies to address areas/issues in schools and/or in the entire education system that may be a cause of poor school performance. The study may also add to the study of the knowledge of primary and secondary

education management besides filling gaps in research that could prompt other researchers to do similar studies in other region or levels of education. Finally, academics may synthesize the concepts given, as well as propose new methods for creating and increasing knowledge on the topic. In other words, other scholars will use the findings of this study as prior reading when conducting similar studies in the future.

2. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

2.1. Study Design

According to Orodho (2003), a research design is a scheme, outline or plan that is used to generate answers to research problems. It is an arrangement of conditions for collection and analysis of data in a manner that aims to combine relevance with the research purpose. In this regard, this study employed both qualitative and quantitative research approaches. Kothari and Garg (2013) state that qualitative approach is concerned with the subjective assessment of attitudes, opinions and behavior, while quantitative approach is concerned with factors to which a numerical figure can be ascribed. In this study, the researcher utilized case study design to collect, analyses and interpret the findings. A case study sought to describe a unit in detail, in context and holistically (Kombo & Tromp, 2013). The unit of analysis in the current study was an individual as the study studied effects of free education on provision of quality education from head teachers, teachers, education standard officers and pupils. It is a way of organizing educational data and looking at the object to be studied in depth and as a whole. A case study design is appropriate for this study as it will give a deeper insights and better understanding on the effect of free education policy on the provision of education in Zambian schools.

2.2. Research Site

The study was carried out in Kasama District of the Northern Province of Zambia. Kasama District is located 852 km from Lusaka the capital city of Zambia with an area of 10,788 km².

2.3. Population, Sample and Sampling Procedure

The population for the study comprised The population comprised of education standards officers, school managers, class/subject teachers and pupils; giving a total of thousand six hundred and fifty (1650) as the target population. The respondents of this study were drawn from four (4) selected schools in Kasama district; 2 Primary and 2 secondary schools. The respondents in this research were broken down as shown in Table 1 below.

Table 1: Respondents from four (4) schools

CATEGORY	PRIMARY	SECONDARY	TOTAL
Education Standards Officers	1	1	2
School Heads	2	2	4
Class Teachers	7	7	14
Pupils	146	146	292
TOTALS	156	156	312

2.4. Data Analysis

Data analysis refers to examining what has been collected in a survey or experiment and making deductions and inferences. Kasonde-Ng`andu (2014) states that data analysis is the manipulation of the collected data for the purpose of drawing conclusions that reflect on the interests, ideas and

theories that initiated the study. In this study, the researcher used thematic analysis to analyze qualitative data and descriptive statistics to analyze quantitative data. Thematic analysis is qualitative method in which major subjects or concepts that come up in the discussion are identified and examined. Statistical package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 22 and Microsoft Excel were used to analyze the quantitative data, while NVIVO was used to analyze qualitative data.

2.5. Ethical Issues

Ethical issues are a very important component to any social research. Social scientists continue to have the freedom to conduct research involving other people in large part, the product of individual and social good-will depends on social scientists acting in ways that are not harmful and are just (Israel & Hay, 2006). Ibid (2013) states that ethical behavior helps protect individuals, communities and environments, and offer the potential to increase the sum of the good in the world. This study was in line with the ethical requirements in that participants were not forced to take part but were given an opportunity to make informed and free choice to participate in the study. Issues regarding informed consent were addressed by providing informants with written information pertinent to the nature and purpose of the study. Additionally, the participants’ identities were kept anonymous as a way of enhancing confidentiality and privacy.

3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

The following findings and discussions were presented according to set research objectives:

3.1. Extent to Which Government Provides Funding Under Free Education

The study sought to find out the extent to which government was providing funding for implementation of free education policy in Kasama district of Northern Province of Zambia. Several questions were asked to determine this. Respondents were asked to indicate how often they received funding from government for the implementation of free education policy. Findings are shown in figure 1 below. N =

N = 16 comprising of 11 teachers, 3 head teachers and 2 Education Standards Officers.

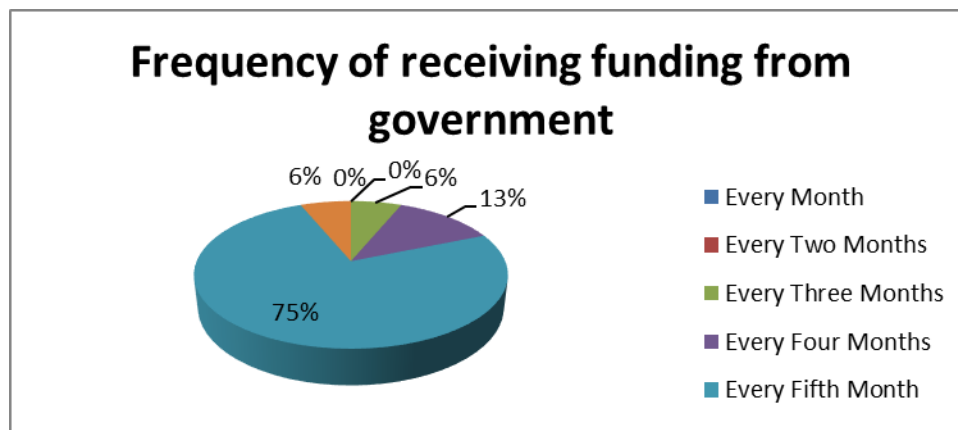


Figure 1: Sources of Learning and Teaching Materials under Free Education Policy

The study revealed that the schools on average are funded every after five months as shown in figure 1 by the total number of respondents at 75 percent. 13% indicated that they received funding

from government every four months while 6% indicated that they received funding every three after three months while another 6% indicated that they had no idea.

Findings from interview with Education standard officers also indicated the government funding was not provided frequently as one of the respondents during interview lamented the following:

We normally receive funding from government through the ministry of education, although it takes long for it to finally reach us here.

The study revealed that the schools on average are funded every after five months as shown by the total number of respondents at 76 percent. These results show that there is a huge indication of the inconsistencies that appear to affect the quality of education. The study also revealed that all the schools are funded an average amount of between One Thousand and Five Thousand Kwacha (K1, 000.00 – K5, 000.00). In view of the increased enrolments and other operational challenges, schools are unlikely to fully implement this progressive policy as much of the undertakings related to its implementation require financial resources. According to the findings, government provided funding for the implementation of free education policy as 87% of the respondents indicated that funding for free education in Northern Province of Zambia was provided by government through the Ministry of Education. The study revealed that all the schools have realized that following the discontinuation of payment of user fees by pupils, they needed to identify other innovative means of raising funds to supplement the erratic funding from Government. The funds raised are meant to support the management and operational of the school. The study revealed that schools used wall fence advertisement, church activities and hiring out of the School Hall to raise more funds. Although the government was found to be the source of funds for implementation of free education policy, the study findings revealed that the government often and sometimes provided as 50% and 44% of respondents indicated that government often and sometimes provided funding respectively. The finding suggests that government was responsible for funding the free education provision in Northern Province of Zambia. As a result, delayed release of funds by the government would negatively affect the provision of, not only education, but also provision of quality education.

The finding on government being the source for funding for the implementation of free education in Zambia was also reported by Mulenga (2015) and Phiri and Given (2014) in their studies on free education policy and quality education in Ndola and Chipata respectively. Funding of public schools is one of the major functions of the government.

Provision of education requires funding in order to provide teaching and learning materials. Free education was introduced to ensure that the right to education is accorded to all citizens regardless of background, gender, sex, social class, race and ethnicity. With free education, the onus to provide funding rests on the government. Under the international law, states have the obligation to use the maximum of their available resources to realize the right to education. To ensure that right to education is implemented effectively, states should ensure that a sufficient proportion of the national budget is allocated to education financing and that the money is used effectively and equitably to guarantee education for all, as well as redress inequalities. Thus, Zambia having introduced free education in primary and secondary schools is mandated to fund its implementation. International Declarations, such as the 2011 Jomtien Statement, recognize that states should spend at least 6% of their GDP and /or at least 20% of their national budgets on education in order to achieve quality education for all. Funding of education remains one of the important resources that are needed to manage the school system. All levels of education; primary,

secondary and tertiary require sufficient level of funding in order to improve on the standard of education provided in the country. When funding is not provided in the right quantity and at the right time, it affects the education sector in so many ways.

Firstly, it leads to infrastructure decay. According to Sifuna & Sawamura (2011) infrastructure is a term used to refer to products, services and facilities that are needed for an institution to function. It therefore means that the ability of the school system to achieve her objectives depends on the availability of these products. Infrastructures are very important for learning to take place in any educational institution. Deininger (2003) stated that “Infrastructures play a significant role in the provision of quality education in any nation”. They aid in the dissemination, assimilation and transmission of knowledge. However, when funds are not available for the provision and maintenance of these facilities, it could result into a dilapidation of existing structures as a result of wear and tear and lack of maintenance. Funding is also required to upgrade facilities in the school environment and make them useful based on modern trends.

Secondly, it leads to low level of commitment among staff. One of the benefits of funding is that it serves as a means of motivating staff in the work environment. According to Kabir (2016) salary is one of the hygiene factors that motivate staff to work. When this is not forthcoming, it reduces the level of commitment of workers in the organization. The timely and adequate payment of staff salaries and other welfare package is a factor that stimulates worker’s willingness to work. Funding is therefore necessary in order to arouse the commitment of workers in the work place. The absence of this benefit will result to a poor level of commitment to work. Thirdly, it leads to low level of academic performance. Availability of facilities such as libraries, laboratories, workshops etc. are necessary for a productive learning. These facilities make it easier for teachers and students to carry out their basic responsibilities in the school. Students need learning materials to learn well while the teachers also require teaching aids to be effective. However, in a situation where these facilities are not available for self-development, the performance level of both teachers and students will be very low. This is because teachers and students will have idler time than productive time. The implication is that study periods will reduce and learning outcome will be low. Therefore, the availability of funds plays a significant role in determining the provision of quality education at all levels. The quantity of funds made available during budgeting will go a long way in improving on the quality of education provided. Adequate funding will be of importance in the provision of quality education as it leads to infrastructural development in the school and provision of learning and teaching materials.

Respondents were asked to indicate how much money government released (they received) per month for implementation of free education policy for their school. Findings are shown in figure 2 below. *N = 14 comprising of 11 teachers and 3 head teachers.*

According to findings in figure 2, the study revealed that 79% of respondents indicated that government released 1000 – 5000 per month for each school for implementation of free education in Kasama. This was followed by those who indicated that government released 5000 – 10 000 per month for each school, accounting for 14%. 7% of the respondents indicated that they had no idea of how much government released per month for each school in Kasama district.

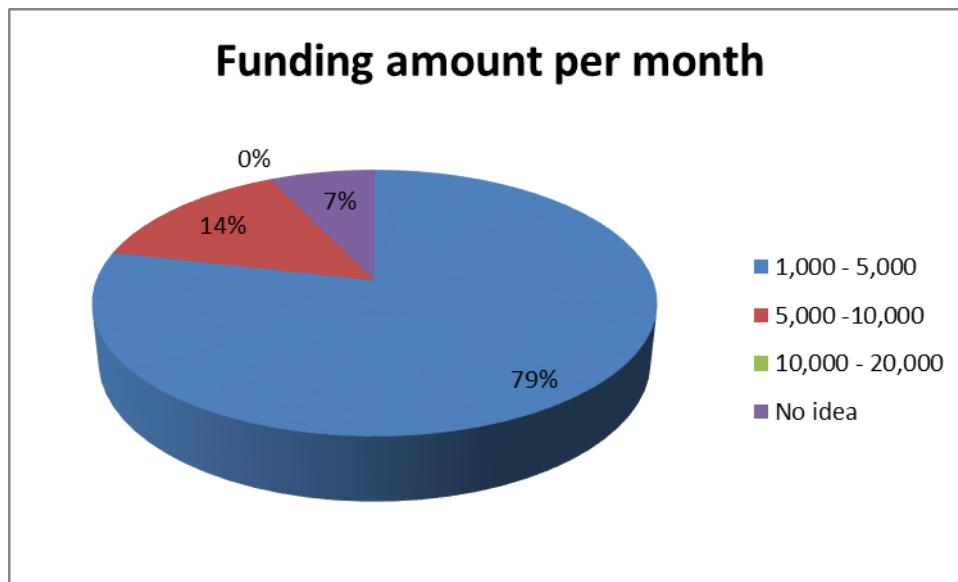


Figure 2: Funding Amount Released by Government Per Month Under Free Education Policy

Respondents were asked to indicate the adequacy of the funds released by government for implementation of free education policy for their school. Findings are shown in figure 3 below. $N = 16$; comprising of 11 teachers, 3 head teachers and 2 education standard officers.

According to findings in figure 3, study findings revealed that the funds provided by government for free education was inadequate, accounting for 94%. Only 6% of the respondents indicated that they had no idea. No respondent indicated that the funding was adequate, accounting for 0% of total respondents. Focus group discussion also revealed that funding was inadequate as pupils indicated that they were meant to sit three-three on desks well others sat on the floor as seen in the text below:

We are many in class and the desks are not enough as others are meant to sit on the floor while we sit 3 – 3 on each desk.

The interview findings with education standards officers also indicated the same findings that funding was inadequate as one of the education standards officers had the following to say:

Government does provide funding for free education... however, schools are many and the number of children enrolled, especially in primary school, is many as well. This enables the government to ration available resources so that each school can get the little that is there. So mainly funds may not be adequate, but government is doing everything possible to implement the free education policy beyond primary school.

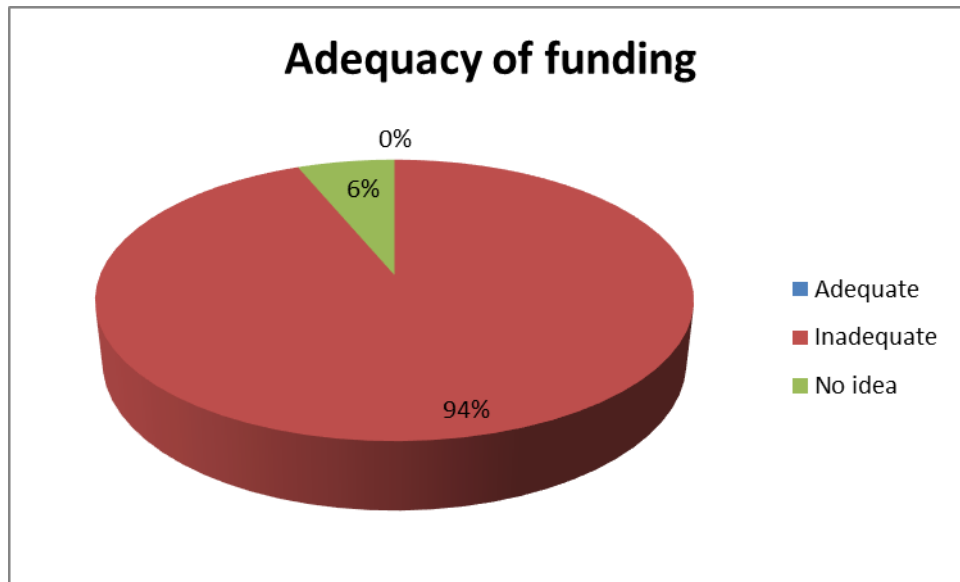


Figure 3: Adequacy of Provided Funds for Free Education

Respondents were further asked to indicate other means that the school was using to raise funds to support implementation of free education policy. The findings are shown in figure 4 below. The figure 4 above illustrates the responses from the 11 teachers and 3 head teachers who were involved in the study when asked on other sources of funds for implementation of free education policy. 10 teachers and 1 head teacher said wall fence advertising was used to raise funds to support free education implementation. 6 teachers said that schools raised funds for free education implementation through church activities. Additionally, 11 teachers and 1 head teacher mentioned that hiring out of the school hall helped schools to raise funds to supplement government efforts.

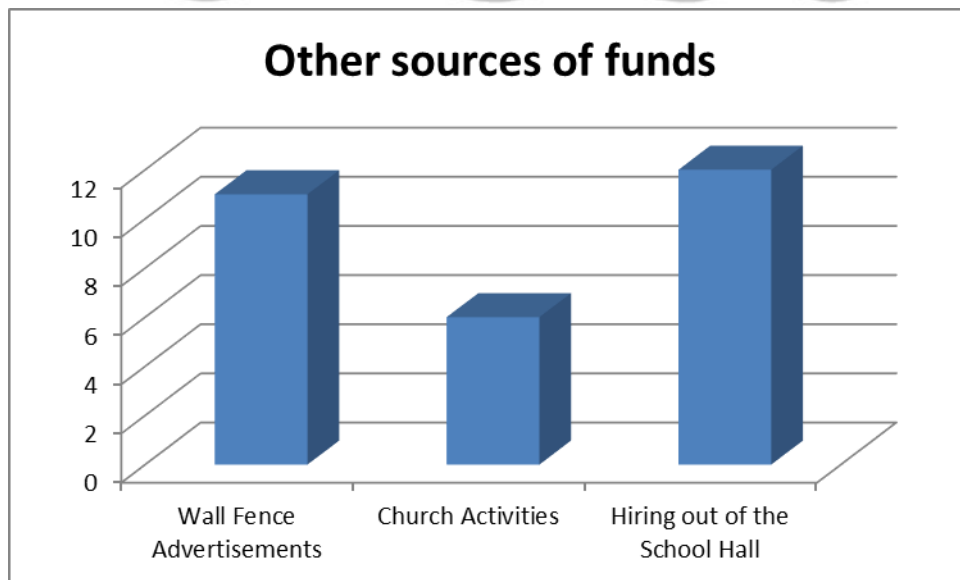


Figure 4: Other Sources of Funds to Support Implementation of Free Education

3.2. Effect of Class Size Under Free Education Policy on Quality Education

The second objective aimed at assessing the effect of class size under free education policy on provision of quality education. Several questions were asked to determine this and the findings are

given below. The study sought to find out the streams of classes that are there in the schools for each class. Findings are shown in table 4.8 $N = 11$ teachers.

Table 2: Number of Streams of Classes

Stream of Classes	Frequency	Percentage (100%)
One	0	0
Two	1	9.1
Three	3	27.3
Four	4	36.3
Five or more	3	27.3
Total	11	100%

According to findings in table 1, majority of the respondents indicated that they had four streams of classes, accounting for 36.3%. This was followed by those who had three and five or more streams of classes, accounting for 27.3% and 27.3% respectively. Only 9.1% indicated that they had two streams of classes under free education policy implementation.

Odhiambo (2008) say that class size is one of the factors that determine the quality of education being provided. The findings have revealed that teachers were handling more streams of classes under free policy education as 90.9% indicated to have 3 to 5 streams of classes that they handled. Only 9.1% indicated that they had two streams of classes under free education policy implementation. Furthermore, the findings revealed that the majority (54.5%) of the teachers handled classes with number of learners above 50. This indicates that the class sizes were large or overcrowded. In other words, free education policy has led to increased enrolment leading to large class sizes. With the reported overcrowding, the study further revealed that the large class size lead to strained resources (5 teachers) compromised quality of education (4), strained infrastructure (2) and lowered teacher accountability (2). This finding is in line with Chanda (2023) who reported that free education policy in selected schools in Lusaka led to compromised quality of education, strained infrastructure, strained resources and lowered teacher accountability.

The findings are in conformity with those by Plank (2007) who reported that after school fees were abolished in Malawi, the ratio of pupils to classrooms increased to 70:1, the ratio of pupils to teachers increased to 80:1, and the ratio of pupils to text books increased to 24:1. The same author also reported that the abolition of school fees in other countries including Uganda, Cameroon and Mozambique resulted in rapid increase in the pupil teacher ratios. Class size can affect how students learn and even determine the amount of material covered during a class period. According to Gakure, Mukuria and Kithae (2013), the number of students in a class has the potential to affect how much is learned in a number of different ways. Firstly, it affects the way a teacher will teach and conduct lessons. For example, a large class with a lot of noise may mean less time for the teacher to cover academic tasks slated for the day. The teacher may also be deterred from assigning group work, which is a best practice in education, because there are simply too many groups to manage. A small class, in contrast, may encourage more teacher pupil interactions, which has been shown to improve student outcomes (Lackney., 1996).

According to findings in figure 4.5 indicates that 86% (12) of the respondents revealed that teachers were unable to give the much needed attention to pupils during lessons under the free education policy. On the other hand, a minority of 14% (2) indicated that pupils received the needed attention during lessons. This clearly indicates that pupils did not receive the much needed attention during lessons and this could be attributed to large class size were a teacher is unable to attend to each pupil individually. Provision of quality education requires teachers to have a one on one with pupils in order to attend to each and every individual need of the learners. As indicated by Kauger. (2018), individualized approaches to teaching and learning are one approach that ensures that quality of education is achieved. Our classrooms are filled with diverse learners, and when the class size is large, it becomes even impossible to attend to each and every individual learner. Teachers struggle to time to use individualized instruction in the classroom and making it difficult to meet the varied needs of learners. Therefore, lack of one on one with pupils compromises the quality of education that learners receive. Classroom environment seems to be an important motivating factor that makes or mar the teaching and learning process (Mulenga, I. M. and Chileshe, 2020).

This finding shows that most of the schools in Northern Province of Zambia had overcrowded classrooms which affected the effectiveness of the teacher thus affecting the quality of education. Attention was mostly given to brighter pupils while weaker pupils were left behind. This finding is in line with Munyi (2011) in Kenya who reported that inability of the teachers to give individualized attention to slow learners was one of the greatest impacts of free education. Same study reported that large classes lead to teachers' inability to provide attention to individual pupils; this is also the case in this study. Lack of individualized attention can also be attributed to inadequate number of teachers. The study findings revealed that schools did not have adequate number of teachers. This was an indication that the number of teachers did not match the increased enrolment occasioned by free education policy, especially in primary schools. The standard officer was asked how they deal with the shortage of teachers to ensure that the standards of education are maintained and pupils benefit from free education policy. He said that they encourage the head teachers to partner with parents to employ teachers on contract basis. A much larger teacher workforce needed to respond to the burgeoning class sizes, this demand is rarely met. This has resulted to decline on quality education.

Findings further revealed that marking of assignments or class work was mainly done by teachers as 63.3% indicated that class work was marked by teachers. The implication of this is that teachers will have to spend more time on marking class work as the number of learners in a class is high (Oppong Frimpong, 2017). The negative effect of this is that the teacher will spend more time on marking class work than impacting knowledge on learners. When the number of pupils increases, teachers are unable to mark pupil's assignments (home work). Following the implementation of free education policy, the number of pupils is quite high in most of the schools making the marking of assignments very difficult since there are many exercise books to be marked. This lowers the quality of education.

This finding is in line with that of Munyi (2011) in Kenya who reported that teachers' being unable to mark pupil's assignments in time was one of the major challenges in free education provision. The study reported that introduction and implementation of free education policy led to increase

in class size in most schools and making the marking of assignments very difficult since there are many exercise books to be marked. This lowers the quality of education.

Secondly, class size may affect student achievement. Haambulo & Nakamba (2018) had conducted a comprehensive meta-analysis of CSR studies and found that when classes are comprised of twenty or fewer students, achievement scores increase. For effective learning (quality education) class size should be between 20 and 30. However, the research findings have shown that class size under free policy education was ranging from 40 to above 50 pupils. Thus, with the reported inadequate number of teachers, the teacher pupil ratio is high and negatively affecting student achievement.

The findings from the interviews with education standard officers also revealed that teacher's streams of classes had increased under free education policy as one of the respondents during interview had the following to say:

With the introduction of free education, more children are being enrolled. As a district we had to increase the number of classes to accommodate everyone and as you know, we still have a shortage of teachers.

Findings from focus group discussion with pupils also indicated that teachers were having more than one stream of classes as one of the participants had the following to say:

We go to school at different times even if we are in the same grade and the teacher that teachers us all is just one [name mentioned but withheld].

Respondents were further asked to indicate the average number of pupils per class. The findings are given in table 2 below.

Table 3: Average Number of Pupils Per Class

# of pupils per class	Frequency	Percentage
20 – 30	0	0
31 – 40	1	9.1
41 – 50	4	36.4
Above 50	6	54.5
Total	11	100

As shown in table 2, average number of pupils per class, above 50 scored the highest frequency and consequently the largest percentage of 6 and 54.5% respectively. Respondents with average number of pupils per class of 41 - 50 years came in second and 31 – 40 pupils was the third with their respective score being 36.4% (4) and 9.1% (1). 20 to 30 average numbers of pupils scored the least with 0% (0).

The study further wanted to find out the adequacy of teachers in the schools. The findings are shown in table 3 below.

Table 4: Adequacy of Teachers Under Free Education Policy

Status	Frequency	Percentage
Adequate	4	36.4

Inadequate	7	63.6
Total	11	100

Table 3 shows that most of the schools in Northern Province had inadequate staffing, accounting for 63.6% (7) while 36.4% schools had adequate teachers. This adequate staff could probably be in secondary schools within the potential areas where many teachers reside due to availability of resources and other social amenities.

When asked to comment on the adequacy of teachers in Northern Province and the provision of free education, the ESO had the following to say:

We normally encourage the head teachers to partner with parents to employ teachers on contract basis. A much larger teacher workforce is needed to respond to the burgeoning class sizes, this demand is rarely met. This has resulted to decline on quality education.

Respondents were further asked to indicate how the teacher-pupil ratio under free education policy has affected quality of education being provided. Several themes emerged as the question was open-ended. The researcher grouped similar statements together and findings are shown in figure 5 below.

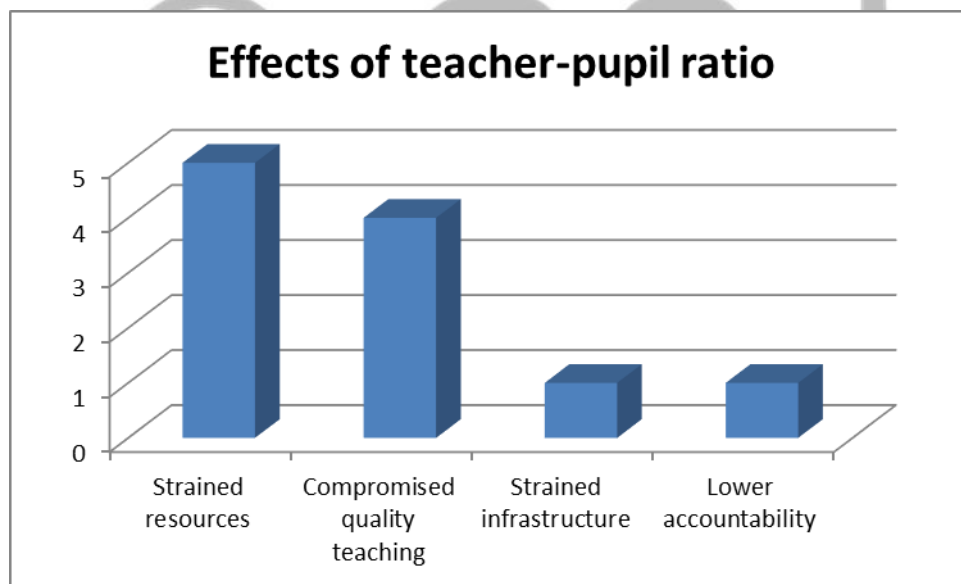


Figure 5: Effects of Teacher-Pupil Ratio on The Provision of Quality Education

Figure 5 above illustrates the responses from the 11 teachers who were involved in the study when asked on the effects of teacher-pupil ratio on quality education. 5 indicated that teacher-pupil ratio strained resources used in learning. 4 teachers said that free education policy compromised the quality of teaching. Additionally, 2 teachers mentioned that free education policy strained infrastructure whereas 2 teachers stated that the policy has lowered accountability on the part of the teachers.

Findings from focus group discussion with learners revealed the following findings in table 4.

Table 5: Learner’s Views on the Effects of Free Education Policy

PERCEPTIONS		
	FREQUENCY	%
Concerns about resources	245	100%
Positive views	136	55.6%
Quality vs. Quantity	204	83.3%
Lack professional development	109	44.4%
Evaluation and accountability	163	66.7%
No Parental involvement	155	61.1%
Teacher/learner motivation	231	94.4%

The table 4 above indicated the views and perceptions of learners on free education policy. The table shows that 55.6% had positive views about free education policy as a good thing, 100% of the respondents had concerns about resources. 83.3% questioned the quality of education versus the quantity. Others (94.4%) said that free education policy requires teacher/ learner motivation for it to fully function. 61.1% of respondents stated no parental involvement in instilling discipline was lacking whereas 44.4% mentioned lack of professional development amongst teachers and lastly, 66.7% alluded to lack of evaluation and accountability in the teaching and learning process. Respondents were asked to agree or disagree whether free education has led to large class size. The findings are shown 6 below.

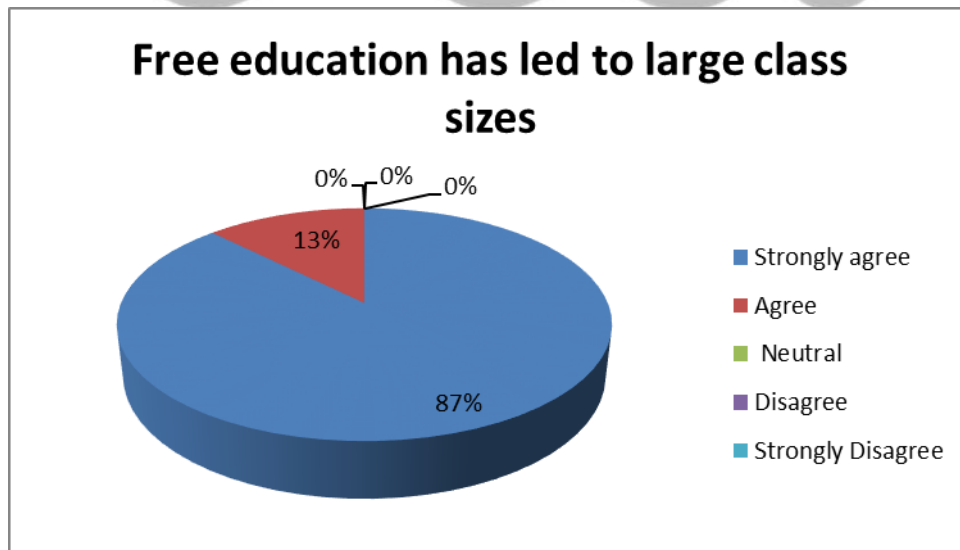


Figure 6: Showing How Free Education Has Led to Large Class Size

According to findings in figure 6, 87% of the respondents strongly agreed that free education had led to large class size. This was followed by 13% who agreed that free education had made class size to be large. Disagree, strongly disagree and neutral scored 0% each.

Interview findings from educational standard officers also revealed that class size had become large under free education as one had the following to say:

As you know, the current free education policy eliminates all fees payable by parents ... as such many more pupils are enrolled leading to large class size of more than 50 pupils per class.

The same sentiments were also echoed during focus group discussion with pupils as many pupils also alluded to being more than 50 in one class.

Having established that class size was large under free education, respondents were further asked to agree or disagree whether large class size leads to less time for the teacher to cover academic tasks slated for the day. The findings are shown in figure 7 below.

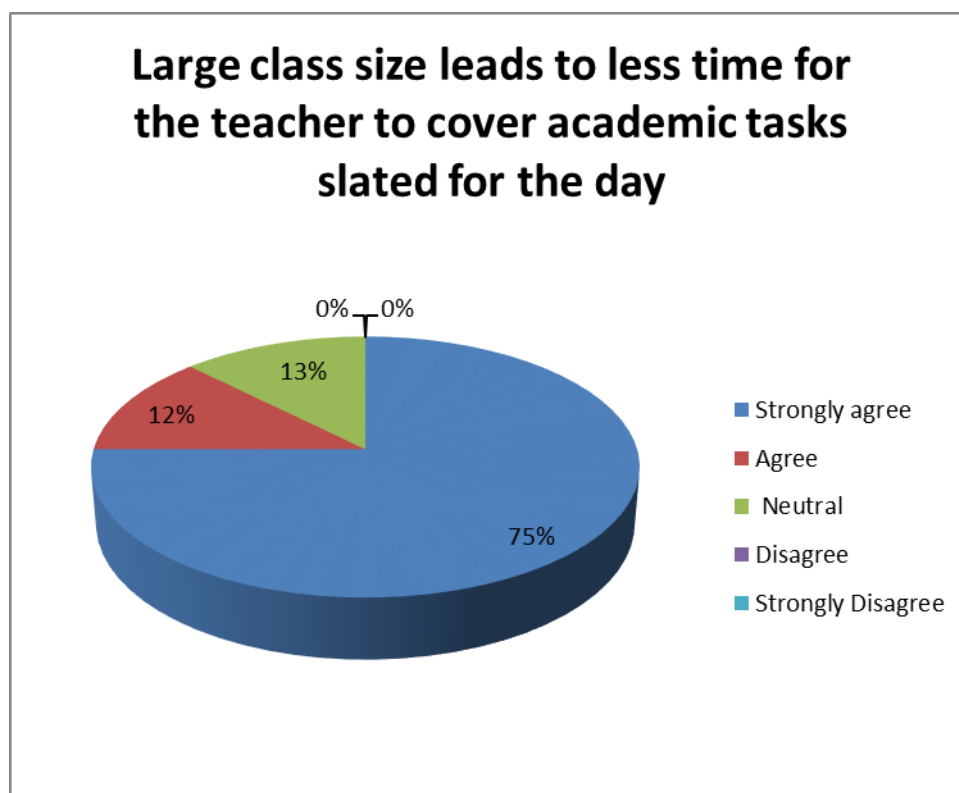


Figure 7: Showing How Large Class Size Leads to Less Time for Teachers to Cover Academic Tasks Slated for The Day

Findings in figure 7 revealed that 75% of respondents strongly agreed that large class size leads to less time for the teacher to cover academic tasks slated for the day. This was followed by 13% who neither agreed nor disagreed that large class size leads to less time for the teacher to cover academic tasks slated for the day. 12% of the respondents agreed that large class size leads to less time for the teacher to cover academic tasks slated for the day. None of the respondents disagreed or

strongly disagreed that large class size leads to less time for the teacher to cover academic tasks slated for the day, accounting for 0% and 0% respectively.

Respondents were further asked to agree or disagree whether large class size makes class unmanageable and affects provision of quality education. The findings are shown 8 below.

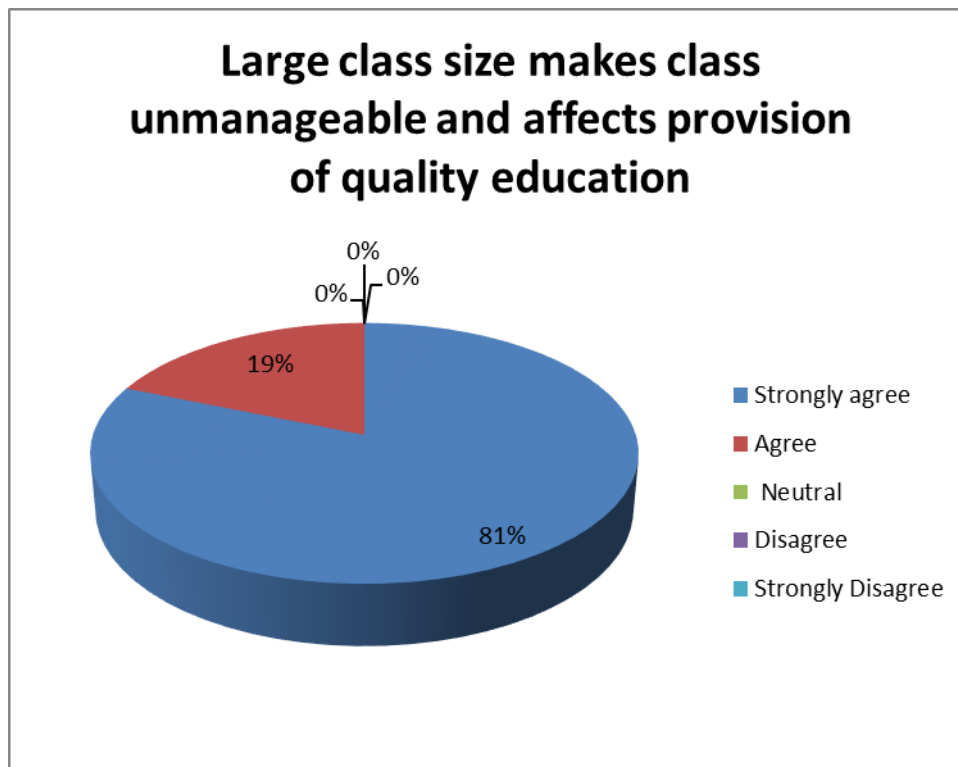


Figure 8: Showing How Large Size Makes Class Unmanageable and Affects Provision of Quality Education

Findings in figure 8 revealed that 81% of the total respondents strongly agreed that large class size makes class unmanageable and affects provision of quality education. This was followed by 19% of respondents who agreed that large class size makes class unmanageable and affects provision of quality education. None of the respondents strongly disagreed and disagreed that large class size makes class unmanageable and affects provision of quality education, accounting for 0% each.

Respondents were further asked to agree or disagree whether large class size encourages less teacher pupil interactions and negatively influences provision of quality education. The findings are shown in figure 9 below.

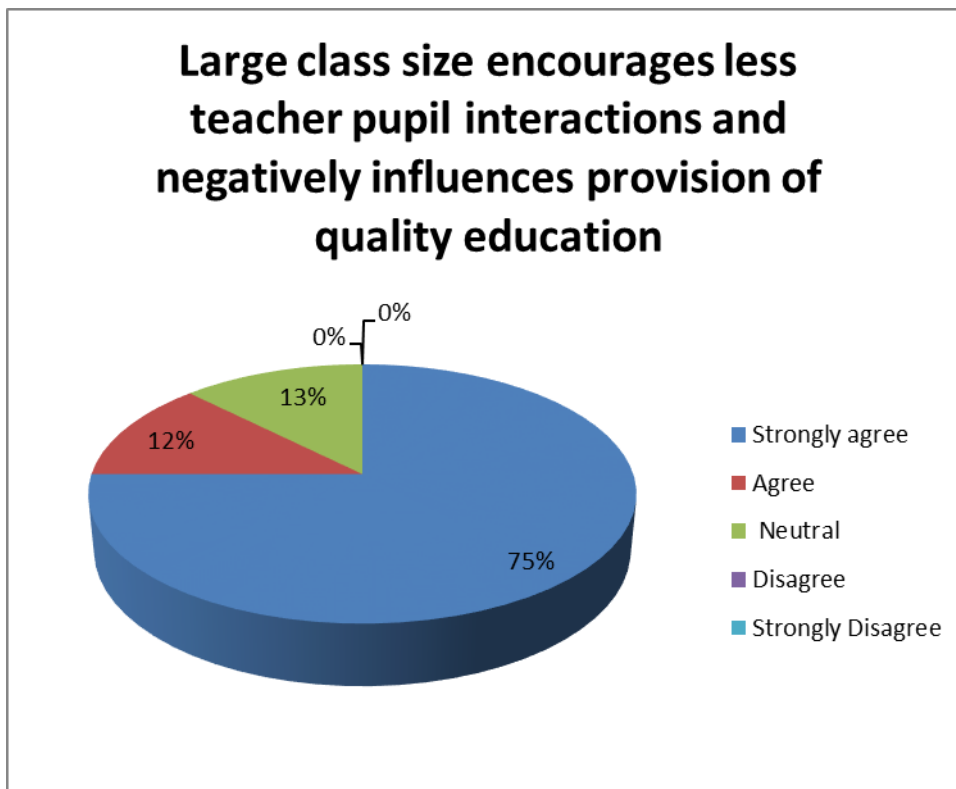


Figure 9: Showing How Large Class Size Encourages Less Teacher Pupil Interactions and Affects Quality Education

According to findings in figure 9 above, majority of the respondents strongly agreed that large class size encourages less teacher pupil interactions and negatively influences provision of quality education. This was followed by 13% who neither agreed nor disagreed that large class size encourages less teacher pupil interactions and negatively influences provision of quality education. Strongly disagree and disagree scored 0% each.

Respondents were further asked to agree or disagree whether large class size dreads continuous assessments which affect provision of quality education. The findings are shown in figure 10 below.

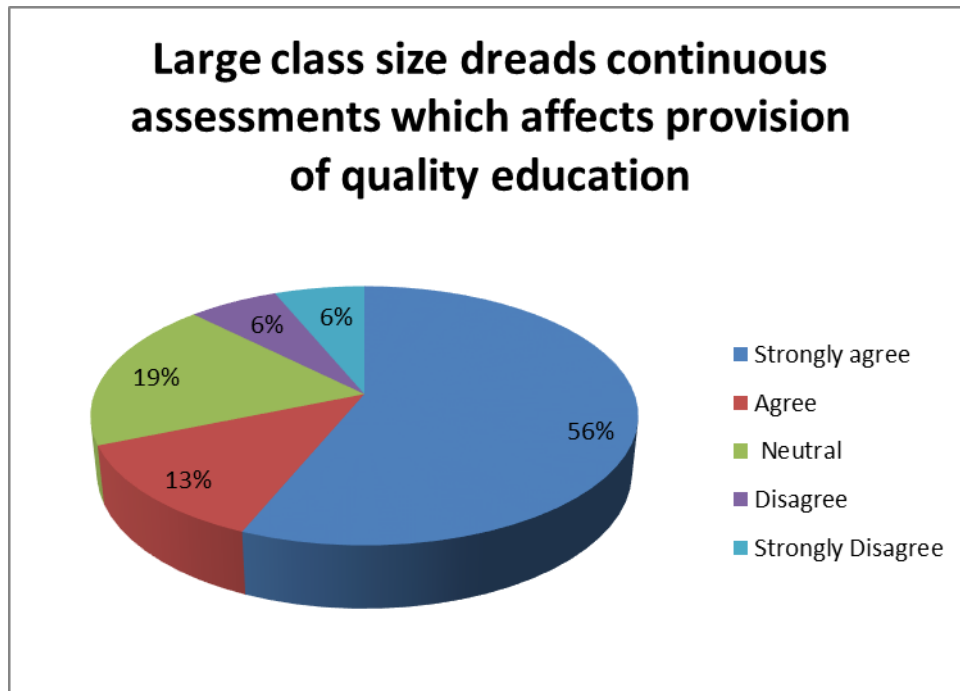


Figure 10: Showing How Large Class Size Dreads Continuous Assessment

According to figure 10, findings revealed that 56% of respondents strongly agreed that large class size dreads continuous assessments which affect provision of quality education. This was followed by 19% who neither agreed nor disagreed that large class size dreads continuous assessments which affects provision of quality education. 13% agreed that large class size dreads continuous assessments which affect provision of quality education.

3.3. Corrective Measures to Improve Teaching and Learning Under the Free Education Policy

The third objective aimed at finding out from the respondents’ corrective measures which government can take to improve teaching and learning under the free education policy. Findings are shown in Figure 11 below.

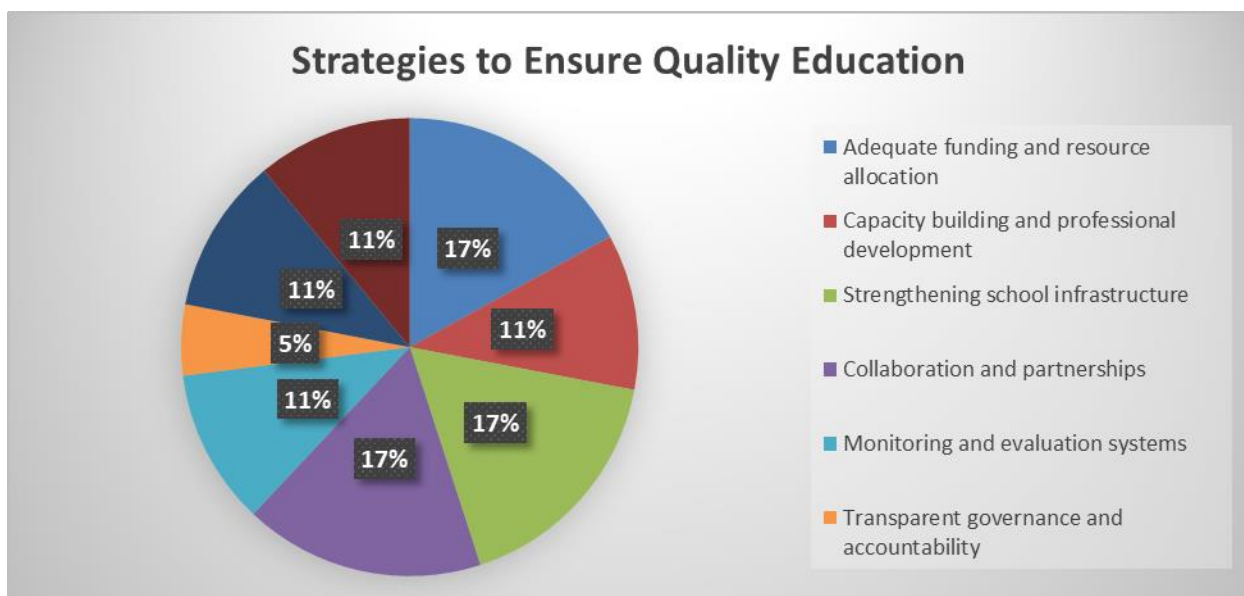


Figure 11: Measures to Improve Teaching and Learning Under Free Education

From the results shown in figure 4.16, ensuring sufficient funding is essential to improve teaching and learning under free education, accounting for 17% who strongly agreed. 13% agreed that adequate funding improves teaching and learning under free education. Investing in the capacity building and professional development of teachers and administrators is crucial, accounting for 11%. Improving school infrastructure is essential to accommodate the increased student enrolment, accounting for 17%. Collaboration among stakeholders, including administrators, teachers, parents, community members, and relevant organizations, is vital, accounting for 17%. Developing robust monitoring and evaluation systems helps administrators track progress and identify challenges in policy implementation, accounting for 5%. Ensuring transparency and accountability in the implementation of free education policies is crucial, accounting for 11%. Administrators encourage community engagement through parent-teacher associations, school management committees, and volunteer programs, accounting for 11%. Education policies periodically reviewed and adapted to address emerging challenges and changing educational needs, accounting for 11%. Administrators gather feedback from stakeholders, assess the policy's impact, and make necessary adjustments to ensure its effectiveness, accounting for 11%. These, among others were the suggested measures to curb the crisis.

The findings revealed that improvement in teaching and learning under free education can be improved by providing adequate funding and materials as 17% of the teacher respondents agreed to that. As indicated above, funding is very essential to the realization of quality education as it enables schools to have needed infrastructure, needed teaching and learning materials as well as needed support services. The study further revealed that improving school infrastructure is essential to accommodate the increased student enrolment. This calls for government to increase allocation to education sector so that more infrastructures can be built. This finding was also reported by Chanda (2023) on her study on free education and its effect on quality education in secondary schools in Lusaka. The study further revealed that collaboration among stakeholders, including administrators, teachers, parents, community members, and relevant organizations, is vital. Collaboration will ensure that where government does not manage to provide for free education, other means can be utilized. This finding was also reported by Mulenga & Kabombwe (2019b) when they reported that schools were collaborating with churches and communities to ensure that funds were raised to supplement government efforts. Administrators should encourage community engagement through parent-teacher associations, school management committees, and volunteer programs. The study further revealed that monitoring and evaluation of systems of free education will help improve teaching and learning under free education. Ndunguru (2018) agrees to this point by adding that developing robust monitoring and evaluation systems helps administrators track progress and identify challenges in policy implementation. Education policies periodically reviewed and adapted to address emerging challenges and changing educational needs. Administrators gather feedback from stakeholders, assess the policy's impact, and make necessary adjustments to ensure its effectiveness. These, among others were the suggested measures to curb the crisis.

4. CONCLUSION

The overall objective of this research was to analyze the effect of the government policy on free education on provision of good quality education in Kasama district of Northern Province in Zambia. A variety of particular research topics were established based on the overarching objective. The study employed a mixed method approach in which both qualitative and quantitative methods of data collection and analysis were used to attain this wide objective. More precisely, the study employed a structured questionnaire survey of teachers and head teachers, interview with education standards officer and focus group discussion with pupils. The results revealed that, in the respondents' opinion, free education policy affected the provision of good quality education in Kasama district of Northern Province in Zambia based in the following lines. Provision of good quality education in Kasama district of Northern Province of Zambia under free education policy is affected negatively. Achieving quality education rests on a number of factors including adequate funding, availability of teaching and learning resources and conducive learning and teaching environments. According to the study findings, government is the main source of funding for implementation of free education policy. However, the findings have revealed that funding is inadequate as government does not frequently provide funds for free education policy implementation. This suggests that when funding is adequate, implementation of free education policy will result in provision of good quality education. Funding is one of the primary crucial factors that contribute to achievement of quality education, according to empirical research and subsequently implementation of free education. Adequate funding ensures that the schools have in place proper infrastructures as well as adequate teaching and learning materials.

The major finding is that government was providing funds for implementation of free policy education, but did not do so frequently leading to inadequate availability of funds. The inadequate availability of funds on the other hand leads to poor quality of education. Therefore, the study concludes that free education policy negatively affected provision of quality education in Kasama district of Northern Province Zambia due to inadequate funding. Availability of adequate teaching and learning materials is yet another factor that contributes to provision of good quality education. The study findings have revealed that availability of teaching and learning materials was inadequate under the free education policy implementation. This could be attributed to inadequate funding that was reported. Availability of teaching and learning materials depends heavily on the availability of funding for the implementation of free education policy. This suggest that when teaching and learning materials are adequately available schools in Kasama district can easily implement free education policy and provide good quality education to learners. Therefore, the study concludes that implementation of free education policy has resulted in shortage of teaching and learning materials mainly due to inadequate funding. This in turn negatively affects the provision of good quality education as its achievement depends heavily on availability of adequate teaching and learning materials.

The study established that the availability of teaching and learning resources influenced the implementation of free education policy to some extent as lack of some materials made it difficult for the learning process to continue smoothly thus decline of quality education. Another key finding of the study was that the schools had inadequate staffing. This made it difficult for teachers to check and mark the assignments on time therefore they were helped by pupils on marking. This has led to decline on quality education. The research also revealed that under free education policy implementation class size has become large, thereby affecting adoption of individualized approach

to learning, which is a very important aspect of achieving good quality education. Large class size has also led to poor classroom environment, according to findings. The findings revealed that teachers did not pay attention to individual needs of learners. The findings further revealed that teacher's free education policy has led to increased enrolment thereby increasing number of books that teachers have to mark. The implication is that teacher spends much of their time marking books than teaching. This in turn negatively effects provision of good quality education in Kasama district of Northern Province. Overall, the study concludes that free education policy implementation has negatively affected the provision of good quality education in Kasama district of Northern Province of Zambia. This is mainly due to inadequate funding, inadequate availability of both human and material resources for teaching and learning as well as increase in size of class due to increased enrolments. Furthermore, enrolment, especially in primary schools, has increased under free education policy resulting in large class sizes. This large class size increases teacher-pupil ratio and creates a poor classroom environment that compromises quality of education provided.

5. RECOMMENDATIONS

The following are actions that should be taken on the basis of the findings of this study:

- There is a need for the government to employ more teachers to deal with the inadequacy of teachers. This will ensure that streams of classes per teacher reduce and that the large classes can be broken down into smaller classes and allocated to each teacher.
- Due to strong emphasis put on funding and its positive impact on provision of good quality education, it is incumbent that the government of Zambia should contribute more funds towards implementation of free education policy to help in purchasing of adequate teaching and learning materials for effective learning as findings have shown that there was inadequate teaching and learning materials under the implementation of free education policy.
- The government of the republic of Zambia should explore various financing options, such as increasing tax revenue, seeking international aid, or public-private partnerships in order to increase revenues for schools.
- The study findings further revealed that there was inadequate availability of teaching and learning materials. The study therefore recommends head teachers and teachers to be innovative and use locally available teaching and learning resources to supplement government efforts.
- The government of the republic of Zambia should evaluate the challenges faced by teachers in provision of quality education under free education policy implementation.

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Authors' Short Biography

	<p>Martina Musonda Chomba specialises in Business Studies, Principles of Accounts and Commerce. Currently, she is the Head of Department (HoD) for Business Studies at Kateshi Day Secondary School in Kasama district of Northern Province, Zambia.</p>
	<p>Neroh H. Mwanapabu specializes in Education Management, Special Education, and Guidance and Counselling. He has been in education system for over 30 years now.</p>



Chanda Chansa Thelma specializes in Social Sciences, Political Science and Education. She has lectured and still lecturing at the University level for seven years now.

Citations: Chomba, M, M, Mwanapabu, N, H, and Chanda, C, T. (2023). **Free Education Policy and Quality Education: A Case Study of Kasama District of Northern Province, Zambia.**

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