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An Evaluation of the Effects of Free Education Policy on the Teaching and Learning of Home Economics in Secondary Schools. A Case Study of Kasama District Zambia

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ABSTRACT

This study evaluated the effects of Zambia's 2021 Free Education Policy on the teaching and learning of Home Economics in secondary schools within Kasama District. Employ a convergent parallel mixed methods case study design, data were collected from 19 teachers, 6 headteachers, 6 Heads of Department, and 34 pupils through questionnaires, semi structured interviews, and focus group discussions. Quantitative analysis revealed a statistically significant 87% surge in average class sizes post policy, overwhelming infrastructure and creating critical resource shortages: 84.2% of teachers reported severely inadequate consumable materials, 73.7% reported non functional equipment, and 63.2% reported poor infrastructure. Consequently, pedagogical quality was catastrophically eroded, with 57.9% of teachers conducting practical lessons rarely or never, forcing a regression to theoretical instruction and rendering skills assessment ineffective for 63.2% of teachers. Thematic analysis of qualitative data confirmed these findings, revealing an access quality paradox where enrolment gains masked a hollowed out learning experience, with peri urban schools disproportionately affected, exacerbating spatial inequities. The study concludes that the policy's undifferentiated implementation has systemically marginalized Home Economics, undermining its practical, skills based mandate. The implicit Theory of Change underpinning the policy was fundamentally flawed for resource-intensive subjects, as it failed to secure essential preconditions such as adequate infrastructure and subject specific funding. To reconcile access with quality, this study recommends that the Ministry of Education urgently implement a differentiated funding model with weighted capitation grants for practical subjects, establish ring-fenced and decentralized procurement systems for consumables, and invest in specialized infrastructure, particularly in underserved peri urban areas.

1. Introduction

The global pursuit of Education for All and Sustainable Development Goal 4 has led many developing nations to institute free education policies as a primary mechanism for dismantling financial barriers to schooling (United Nations, 2015; UNESCO, 2015). Rooted in human capital theory, these policies assume that investments in education yield substantial returns for individuals and societies (Becker, 1964). Across Sub-Saharan Africa, countries such as Kenya, Ghana, and Malawi have witnessed dramatic enrolment surges following fee abolition, though this rapid expansion has frequently overwhelmed infrastructure and diluted per-capita funding, creating a critical tension between access and quality (Bold et al., 2017; Mbiti, 2016). In Zambia, the government declared free primary and secondary education in 2021 to operationalize equity and social justice (Ministry of Education, 2021). Despite initial reports confirmed significant enrolment gains, concurrent studies revealed systemic strains including severe overcrowding, with pupil classroom ratios in some districts exceeding 70:1, and concerns regarding the adequacy of government grants intended to replace lost parent-funded levies (Zambia Statistics Agency, 2022; ZANEC, 2022). Within this broader context, the status of practical subjects such as Home Economics demands specific attention. The pedagogical efficacy of Home Economics is uniquely contingent upon hands-on, experiential learning requiring specialized facilities and consumable materials (International Federation for Home Economics, 2019; Pendergast, 2015). Prior research had already identified chronic under resourcing of the subject in Zambia (Mwape, 2019; Phiri, 2020). The free education policy introduced a potent new variable into this constrained ecosystem, with emerging evidence suggesting that Home Economics rooms were being repurposed for general classrooms and practical sessions reduced (Tembo, 2022). This study was conceived against this backdrop to provide a granular, evidence based evaluation of how the Free Education Policy has influenced the teaching and learning of Home Economics in Kasama District, filling a critical gap in the literature.

1.1 Statement of the problem

The introduction of the Free Education Policy in Zambia was a commendable stride towards equitable access; however, it precipitated a critical crisis in the quality of delivery for practical subjects, with Home Economics being particularly vulnerable. While national data confirmed a dramatic enrolment surge of over 25% in secondary schools since 2021, straining the pupil

classroom ratio to an average of 60:1 (MoGE, 2022), the resultant infrastructural and resource dilution created a palpable discrepancy between the policy's ideal of quality education and the actual classroom reality. The prevailing situation in many schools, including those in Kasama District, was one where specialized Home Economics rooms were repurposed for general classrooms and already limited practical equipment became woefully inadequate for the expanded student population (Tembo, 2022). This resource constraint fundamentally undermined the pedagogical core of Home Economics, which scholars assert is inextricably linked to hands on, experiential learning (Deacon, 2018). Consequently, teachers reported a reversion to theoretical instruction, with practical sessions becoming a rarity, thus negating the subject's objective to equip learners with crucial life skills (Chileshe, 2020). The magnitude of this problem is further illustrated by a ZANEC (2023) report which highlighted that over 65% of sampled schools in Northern Province faced critical shortages of consumable materials for Home Economics, directly impairing learning outcomes. This gap between policy intent and practical implementation demonstrates a clear problem: the Free Education Policy, in its current implementation framework, has systemically marginalized practical subjects, eroding their quality and relevance. Therefore, this study recognized an urgent call for action to investigate this specific issue, as there is a pressing need to generate empirical evidence on the precise effects of the policy on Home Economics to inform strategic interventions that can safeguard educational quality without compromising access.

1.2 Objectives of the study

This study aims to achieve the following objectives:

I. To investigate the effect of the Free Education Policy on the provision of Home Economics education in Kasama District.
II. To assess the quality of teaching and learning of Home Economics in secondary schools following the policy's implementation.
III. To establish measures that could be employed to improve the quality of teaching and learning in the Home Economics subject.

1.3 Research Question

This study aimed to answer the following questions:

I. How does Free Education Policy influence the provision of Home Economics education in Kasama District?
II. What was the quality of teaching and learning of Home Economics in secondary schools following the policy's implementation?
III. What measures could be employed to improve the quality of teaching and learning in the Home Economics subject?

2. Literature Review

This chapter reviews literature on free education policies and their effects on practical subjects, focusing on Home Economics. Anchored in the Theory of Change (Weiss, 1995), it examines causal pathways between policy implementation and educational outcomes. The review analyses evidence from Sub Saharan Africa, including Kenya, Ghana, Malawi, and Uganda, drawing parallels with Zambia (Bold et al., 2017; Akyeampong, 2017; Mbiti, 2016).

2.1 Effect of the Free Education Policy on the provision of Home Economics education in Kasama District.

Research demonstrates that while fee abolition successfully expands enrolment, it frequently overwhelms existing infrastructure and resource bases. In Nepal, schools repurposed specialized rooms into general classrooms to accommodate enrolment surges, directly undermining practical subject provision (Khanal, 2016). Similarly, in the Philippines, delayed government subsidies forced educators to scale back hands-on training in favor of theoretical instruction (Tan, 2017). Across Sub Saharan Africa, these patterns are particularly pronounced. Kenya's 2008 fee abolition led to pupil classroom ratios escalating from 45:1 to over 70:1, with schools reducing or eliminating practical subjects due to resource constraints (Bold et al., 2017; Mbiti, 2016). In Ghana, the double track system introduced to manage enrolment left insufficient time for practical syllabi, while shared facilities accelerated equipment deterioration without commensurate maintenance budgets (Akyeampong, 2017; Opoku-Asare et al., 2020). Malawi experienced endemic delays in grant disbursements, leaving schools without funds for consumable materials for subjects like Home Economics (Kadzamira & Rose, 2017). Within Zambia, prior research had already documented chronic under-resourcing of Home Economics, with dysfunctional facilities and irregular material supplies (Mwape, 2019; Phiri, 2020). Following the 2021 Free Education Policy, studies revealed that 68% of schools reported deterioration in teaching materials, 72% reduced practical lesson frequency, and 45% converted Home Economics rooms into general classrooms (ZANEC, 2022). Teachers reported that per pupil grants were inadequate to replace lost parent levies, and bureaucratic delays prevented timely procurement (Masinja, 2023). Tembo (2022) found that headteachers prioritized examination subjects in budgetary allocations, cutting Home Economics material budgets by up to 60%, while increased pupil teacher ratios made practical supervision untenable. This literature establishes that free education policies, without commensurate resource mobilization, systematically compromise provision of practical subjects.

2.2 Quality of teaching and learning of Home Economics in secondary schools following the policy's implementation.

Globally, research demonstrates that rapid enrolment increases unaccompanied by proportional investments systematically erode instructional quality, forcing teachers to adopt lecture based pedagogies that prioritize information transmission over active learning and practical skill development (World Bank, 2018). In Indonesia, the frequency of hands on activities in practical subjects declined by an average of 40% following fee abolition, correlating with measurably lower skill acquisition among pupils (Suryadarma & Jones, 2013). Across Sub Saharan Africa, these patterns are pronounced. In Kenya, teachers largely abandoned practical demonstrations in Home Economics, instead dictating notes for pupils to copy, with one teacher remarking we are now

teaching Home Economics as if it were History all theory, no practice (Ohba, 2013, p. 487). Pass rates in practical subjects declined by an average of 12 percentage points post policy (KNEC, 2011). Bold et al. (2017) documented that in schools with pupil teacher ratios exceeding 60:1, teachers spent less time on lesson preparation and drastically reduced formative assessments. In Ghana, the proportion of instructional time devoted to active learning activities declined from 38% pre-policy to 22% post-policy, with 78% of technical subject teachers reporting significantly reduced or eliminated practical sessions due to resource constraints (Akyeampong et al., 2018; Opoku Asare et al., 2020). In Uganda, practical lessons in Home Economics declined by 67%, from 12 to just 4 per term (Bukenya, 2017). Within Zambia, pre policy research had already documented that 65% of schools conducted fewer than six practical sessions per term, well below curriculum requirements (Chileshe, 2020). Following the 2021 policy, 83% of teachers reported reduced instructional quality due to increased class sizes and reduced access to consumables (Masinja, 2023). ZANEC (2023) found that only 28% of schools conducted practical Home Economics lessons at prescribed frequency, with pupil to equipment ratios averaging 8:1 for sewing machines and 12:1 for cooking stations, far exceeding recommended maximums. Tembo (2022) documented that pupils received less than six minutes of hands on practice per lesson, rendering practical engagement pedagogically meaningless. The literature converges on the conclusion that free education policies have systematically eroded instructional quality in practical subjects.

2.3 Measures that could be employed to improve the quality of teaching and learning in the Home Economics subject.

Differentiated or weighted funding formulae that allocate higher per pupil resources to subjects with higher instructional costs have proven effective, with countries like Finland and Singapore achieving better quality outcomes through subject specific funding coefficients (Hanushek & Woessmann, 2015). The Netherlands implemented ring fenced vocational education funds that cannot be reallocated to other purposes, resulting in measurable improvements in practical instruction quality (Kuijpers & Meijers, 2012). Centralized procurement systems for teaching materials, as implemented in Rwanda, achieved economies of scale and more equitable distribution, though implementation challenges included delivery delays (Uworwabayeho, 2017). Public private partnerships with industries provided equipment and expertise to schools offering vocational subjects, though success was concentrated in urban areas with private sector density (Kingdon & Muzammil, 2013). In Sub Saharan Africa, Kenya introduced a Differentiated Unit Cost policy allocating supplementary funds to schools offering practical subjects, though implementation was hampered by late disbursements and fund diversion (Ngware et al., 2016). Ghana piloted District Resource Centers where multiple schools accessed well equipped workshops, improving practical lesson frequency and quality, though transportation costs posed challenges (Opoku-Asare et al., 2021). Uganda developed teacher training programs titled Teaching Practical Subjects in Challenging Environments, equipping educators with adaptive strategies and improvisation techniques, with ongoing professional learning communities sustaining impact (Bukenya & Lwasa, 2018). Community engagement strategies in Malawi saw schools partner with local farmers and women's groups to access materials for Home Economics, creating mutually beneficial exchanges (Chimombo, 2015). In Zambia, the School Infrastructure and Equipment program aimed to construct specialized facilities, though implementation delays and geographical inequities persisted (Mwale, 2023). School level innovations included rotational practical scheduling to maximize limited resources (Mwanza, 2022), school community partnerships with local suppliers (Siame & Phiri, 2023), and inter-school resource sharing networks (Chanda, 2023). Teacher professional development programs focused on Pedagogy of Resourcefulness equipped educators with improvisation techniques and large class management strategies (Simui et al., 2022). The literature emphasizes that sustainable improvement requires coordinated, multi level interventions rather than isolated solutions.

3. Methodology

A descriptive case study design was adopted for this inquiry. According to Kothari (2004), research design refers to the conceptual structure within which research is conducted, serving as the foundation for data collection, measurement, and analysis. Yin (2018) defines a case study as an empirical inquiry investigating a contemporary phenomenon within its real life context, making this design appropriate for exploring the effects of the Free Education Policy on Home Economics teaching and learning in Kasama District. The target population comprised all 15 public secondary schools offering Home Economics in the district, including 15 headteachers, 15 Heads of Department, approximately 35 Home Economics teachers, and about 1,125 enrolled pupils. A multi-stage sampling approach combined non probability and probability techniques. Purposive sampling selected six schools representing diverse characteristics such as location and size. Census sampling included all six headteachers, six HODs, and all 19 Home Economics teachers from selected schools. Stratified random sampling selected 34 pupils for focus group discussions. The Taro Yamane (1967) formula was applied to determine a representative pupil sample, yielding 34 participants after adjusting for feasibility. Three research instruments were employed: structured questionnaires for teachers, semi structured interview guides for headteachers and HODs, and focus group discussion guides for pupils. Content validity was ensured through expert review by three educational research specialists, while construct validity was established through pilot testing with 10 respondents. Reliability for quantitative components was assessed using Cronbach's Alpha, yielding a coefficient of 0.81 indicating good internal consistency. Data collection occurred over three months, achieving a 100% response rate. Quantitative data were analyzed using STATA, employing descriptive statistics and chi square tests at 0.05 significance level. Qualitative data were transcribed verbatim and analyzed using thematic analysis following Braun and Clarke's (2006) six step framework. Methodological, data source, and investigator triangulation were employed to enhance credibility and validity of findings.

3.1 Sub-Methodology

Data collection was implemented following a phased approach. The first phase involved obtaining necessary permissions from the University Ethics Committee and the Kasama District Education Board Secretary. The second phase comprised administering

structured questionnaires to 19 Home Economics teachers during scheduled school visits, with a 100% response rate achieved through personal administration and follow up. The third phase consisted of conducting semi structured interviews with six headteachers and six Heads of Department in their respective offices, with each session lasting approximately 45 to 60 minutes. The final phase involved conducting six Focus Group Discussions with 34 pupils, each comprising 5 to 7 participants and lasting about 60 minutes. All qualitative sessions were audio recorded with participant consent, and detailed field notes were maintained to capture non verbal cues and contextual observations. The questionnaires contained both closed ended questions using Likert scales to gather quantitative data on resource availability and teaching practices, and open ended sections to collect qualitative insights on challenges and improvement measures. The semi structured interview guides explored policy implementation challenges and resource management strategies from administrative perspectives. The Focus Group Discussion guides explored pupils' lived experiences with Home Economics instruction under the free education policy, including their perceptions of practical lessons, resource availability, and suggestions for improvement. All instruments were pretested before actual data collection to ensure clarity and appropriateness.

3.2 Sub- Methodology

Several limitations were acknowledged in this study. A primary limitation resided in the study's geographical scope, being confined to secondary schools within Kasama District; consequently, the findings may not be universally generalizable to all districts in Zambia, which may have varying resource capacities and implementation dynamics (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The reliance on self reported data from participants, particularly through questionnaires and interviews, presented another limitation, as responses could be influenced by social desirability bias or individual perceptions, potentially affecting the absolute objectivity of some data points. The study's cross sectional nature, providing a snapshot in time, limited its capacity to track the evolving effects of the Free Education Policy over a prolonged duration (Cohen, 1988). Access to certain sensitive official documents, such as detailed school budgetary records, was also beyond the scope of this study, which relied on available reports and participant accounts for financial data. The potential for researcher influence during qualitative data collection, despite stringent protocols, was acknowledged as a factor that could subtly shape the interactions and responses (Guest, Bunce, & Johnson, 2016). These limitations were mitigated through methodological triangulation and strict adherence to ethical protocols.

4. Findings

The findings reveal a largely negative impact of the Free Education Policy on Home Economics education in Kasama District. The data collectively paint a picture of a policy that, while successful in expanding access, has inadvertently triggered unintended consequences that have severely compromised the provision, quality, and practical essence of the subject. The impact on provision was catastrophic, with average class sizes nearly doubling from 33 to 62 pupils, representing an 87% increase. This finding directly mirrors the experiences of Kenya post-2008 fee abolition, where rapid enrolment surges overwhelmed physical infrastructure (Bold et al., 2017; Mbiti, 2016). The unanimous report from teachers of worsened pupil to teacher ratios specifically for practical lessons underscores a critical safety and pedagogical risk. Severe resource shortages were evident, with 84.2% of teachers reporting inadequate consumable materials, 73.7% reporting non functional equipment, and 63.2% reporting poor infrastructure. The qualitative data from headteachers, describing inefficient and delayed procurement, provides the mechanistic explanation for the quantitative scarcity, echoing implementation bottlenecks found in Malawi (Kadzamira & Rose, 2017). Emerging spatial inequity revealed that peri urban schools consistently reported worse conditions than urban counterparts, suggesting the policy may be reinforcing existing inequalities, a concern raised in comparative studies (Filmer & Schady, 2014). The deterioration in teaching and learning quality was a direct consequence of the provision crisis. Most tellingly, 57.9% of teachers now conduct practical lessons only rarely or never, signifying a fundamental betrayal of the subject's pedagogical core rooted in experiential learning (Vygotsky, 1978; Kolb, 1984). This regression aligns with observations in Kenya where teachers reverted to rote learning methodologies in practical subjects (Ohba, 2013). The engagement data reveals a painful paradox: pupil engagement is significantly higher during practical lessons (78.9%) than during theory (42.1%), yet practical lessons are being systematically eliminated. The assessment crisis, where 63.2% of teachers feel unable to assess practical skills effectively, further deepens quality erosion.

4.1 Presentation of Results on Background Characteristics of the Respondents.

Figure 1: respondents by gender

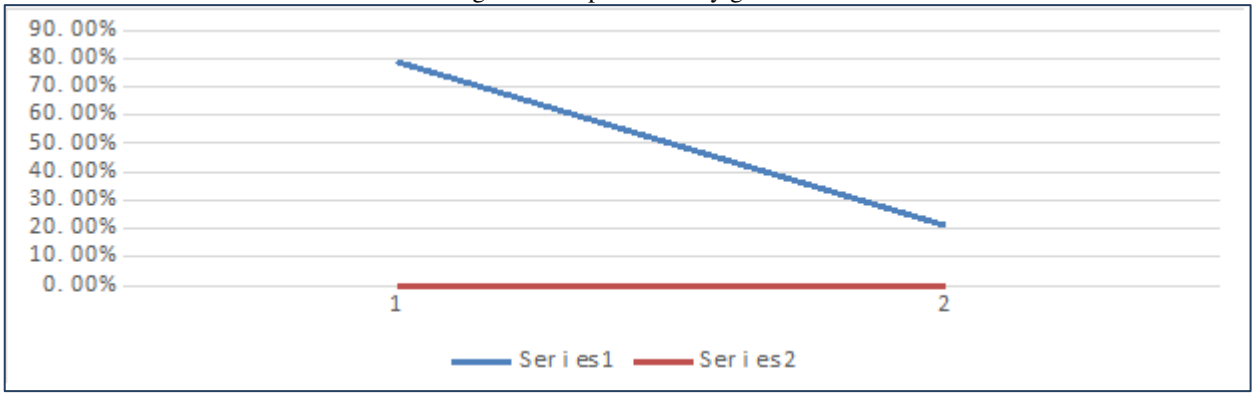
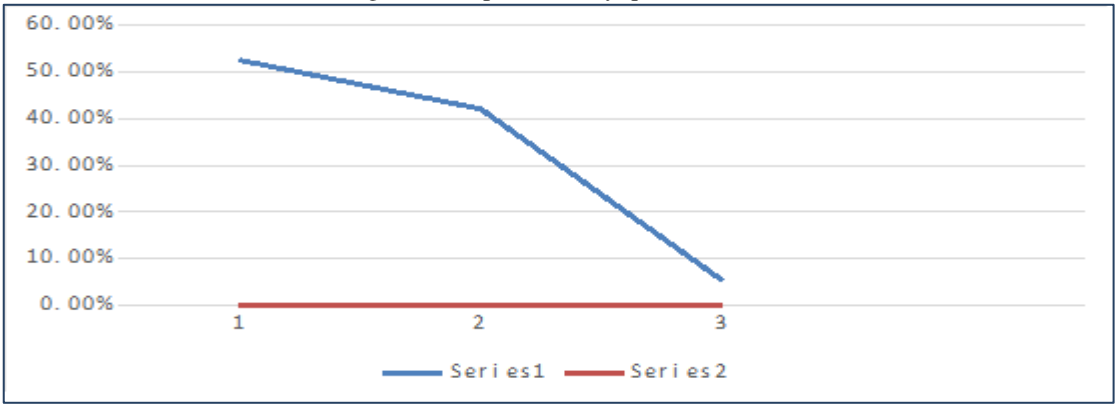


Figure 1 illustrates the gender distribution of Home Economics teachers who participated in the study. The findings reveal th at the majority of respondents, 78.9 percent, were female, while 21.1 percent were male. This gender disparity reflects the broader national trend in Zambia where Home Economics teaching has traditionally been dominated by female educators, consistent with the subject's historical association with female dominated domestic roles (Mwape, 2019; Phiri, 2020). This demographic composition may influence teaching approaches and pupil perceptions of the subject.

Figure 2: respondents by qualifications



The figure above presents the professional qualifications of Home Economics teachers who participated in the study. The findings indicate that over half of the teachers, 57.9 percent, held a bachelor's degree as their highest qualification. Diploma holde rs constituted 36.8 percent of respondents, while only 5.3 percent possessed a master's degree. No teachers reported holding other qualifications. This distribution suggests that Home Economics instruction in Kasama District is delivered by a predominantly degree-holding workforce, indicating a reasonably qualified teaching cadre.

Figure 3: in-service training in the last two years

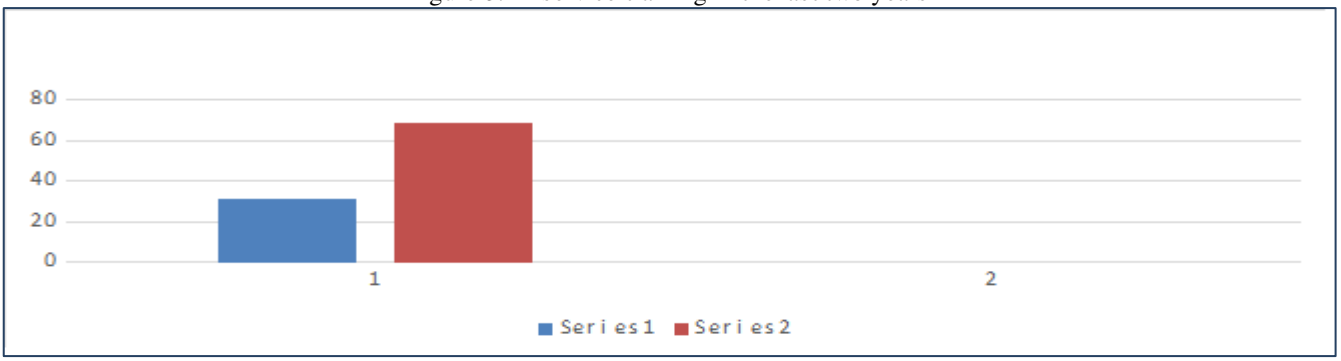
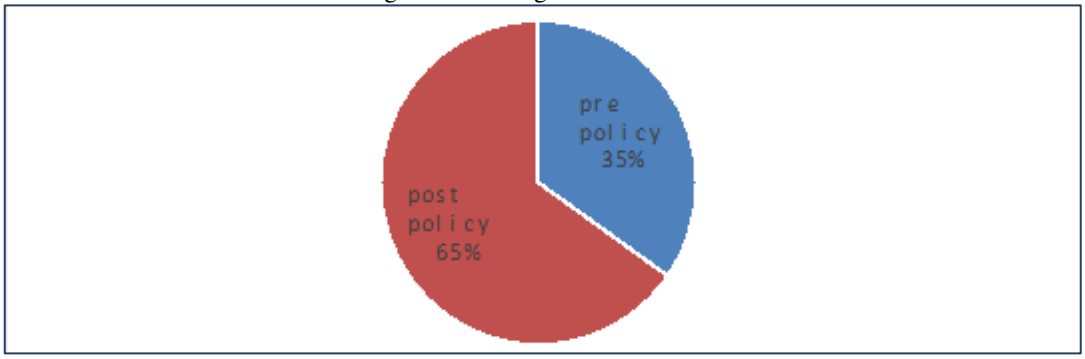


Figure 3 illustrates the in service training received by Home Economics teachers in the two years preceding the study. The findings reveal that the majority of teachers, 68.4 percent, had not received any in service training during this period, while only 31.6 percent had participated in professional development activities. This lack of continuous professional development is significant, as it left most educators ill equipped to adapt their pedagogy to the dramatic new realities ushered in by the Free Education Policy, namely oversized classes and extreme resource scarcity. The finding aligns with research by Simui et al. (2021) in the Zambian context and Bukenya and Lwasa (2018) in Uganda, which identifies a pervasive training gap that exacerbates teachers' difficulties in implementing curricula under constrained conditions.

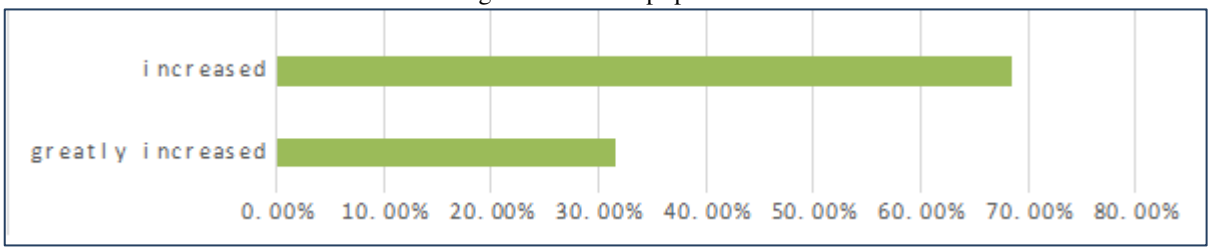
4.2. Impact on Provision

Figure 4: Average classroom size



This figure illustrates the change in average Home Economics class sizes before and after the implementation of the Free Education Policy. The findings reveal a dramatic increase of 87 percent, with average class sizes rising from 33 pupils prior to the policy to 62 pupils following its implementation. This surge in enrolment represents more than a numerical change; it signifies a fundamental alteration of the learning environment, transforming previously manageable practical sessions into overcrowded classrooms where individualized instruction becomes extremely difficult. This finding directly mirrors the experiences of Kenya post 2008 fee abolition, where rapid enrolment surges overwhelmed physical infrastructure and stretched teaching resources perilously thin (Bold et al., 2017; Mbiti, 2016). The near doubling of class sizes has critical implications for practical subject instruction, as effective supervision of hands on activities becomes logistically and pedagogically untenable, raising safety concerns and compromising skill development opportunities for learners.

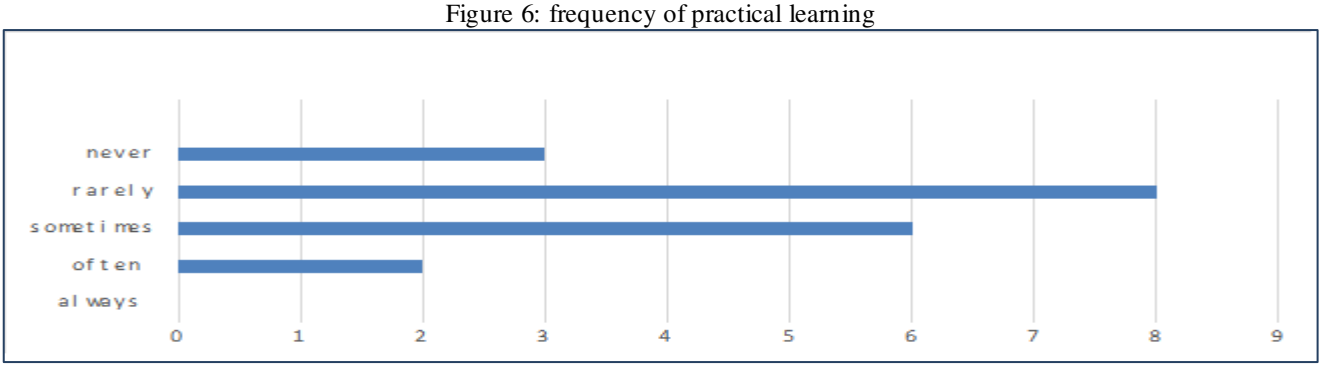
Figure 5: teacher pupil ratio



This figure illustrates teachers' perceptions of changes in the pupil to teacher ratio for practical lessons following the Free Education Policy implementation. The findings reveal that all teachers, representing 100 percent of respondents, reported that the pupil-to-teacher ratio for practical lessons had greatly increased. This unanimous response underscores the severity of the policy's impact on class sizes specifically for hands on instruction. The dramatic increase in ratios has critical implications for Home Economics pedagogy, as practical sessions require close supervision to ensure safety when pupils use equipment such as stoves, ovens, and sewing machines. Teachers can no longer provide individualized guidance or effectively monitor multiple groups simultaneously, transforming skill based lessons into logistical hazards. This finding aligns with Tembo (2022), who documented that increased pupil teacher ratios made it logistically and pedagogically untenable to conduct effective practical lessons, as teachers could not adequately supervise large groups working with potentially hazardous equipment.

4.3. Teaching and Learning quality under free Education

Figure 6: frequency of practical learning



This figure illustrates the frequency with which Home Economics teachers are able to conduct practical lessons as required by the syllabus under the Free Education Policy. The findings reveal that more than half of the teachers, 57.9 percent, conduct practical lessons only rarely, while 21.1 percent conduct them sometimes. Only 15.8 percent reported conducting practical lessons often, and a mere 5.3 percent indicated they always conduct practical sessions as prescribed. No teachers reported never conducting practical lessons, though the high proportion reporting rare practical sessions indicates severe constraint.

Figure 7: Pupil engagement during theory lessons

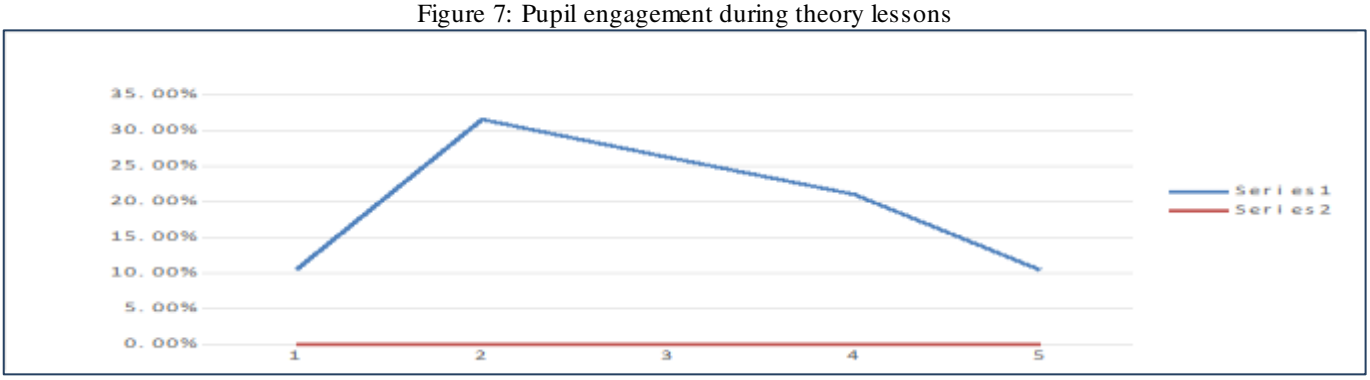


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Figure 8: pupil engagement during practical lessons

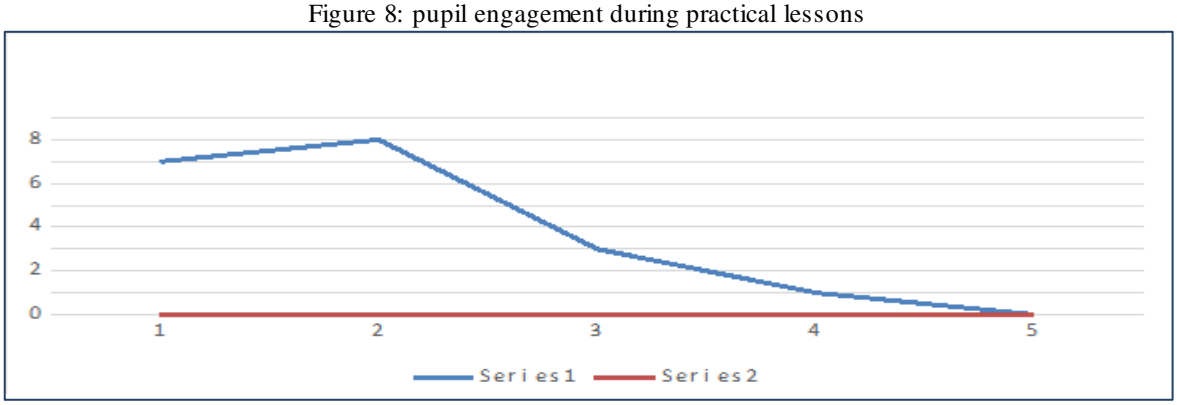
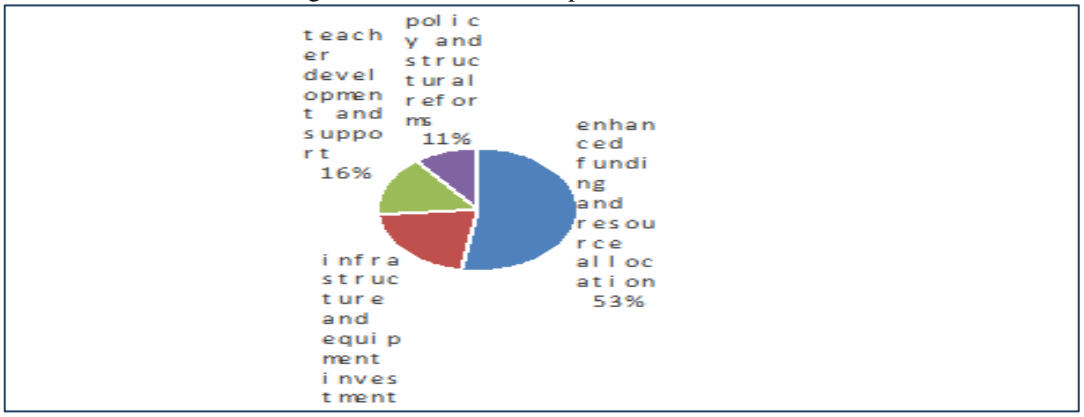


Figure 8 illustrates teachers' ratings of pupil engagement during practical based Home Economics lessons under the Free Education Policy. The findings reveal that the majority of teachers, 78.9 percent, reported high or very high levels of pupil engagement during practical sessions. Specifically, 36.8 percent rated engagement as very high, while 42.1 percent rated it as high. Only 15.8 percent reported moderate engagement, and a mere 5.3 percent reported low engagement, with no teachers reporting very low engagement. This finding stands in stark contrast to engagement levels during theory lessons, where only 42.1 percent of teachers reported high or very high engagement. The significantly higher engagement during practical sessions show the pedagogical importance of hands-on learning in Home Economics and confirms that pupils are most motivated when actively doing rather than passively listening.

4.4. Proposed improvement measures for Home Economics

This figure shows teachers' ratings of the importance of providing regular in-service training for Home Economics teachers as a measure for improving quality. The findings reveal that the majority of teachers, 57.9 percent, rated in-service training as important or very important. Specifically, 26.3 percent rated it as very important, while 31.6 percent rated it as important. A further 26.3 percent considered it moderately important, while 10.5 percent rated it as slightly important and only 5.3 percent as not important. This recognition of professional development as important reflects teachers' awareness that adapting to the new realities of oversized classes and resource scarcity requires new pedagogical skills not covered in their initial training.

Figure 10: most critical improvement measures



The figure above shows teachers' perspectives on the single most critical measure needed to improve the quality of Home Economics teaching and learning under the Free Education Policy. The findings reveal that adequate government funding was most frequently cited as the most critical improvement measure. This overwhelming prioritization of funding reflects teachers' direct experience that the current financing model is fundamentally inadequate for supporting practical subject instruction.

5. Summary, Conclusion and Recommendations

5.1 Summary

The study concludes that the Free Education Policy has precipitated a severe crisis in the provision of Home Economics, transforming quantitative access into qualitative deprivation. While the policy successfully achieved its primary aim of expanding enrolment, as evidenced by the 87% increase in average class size, this surge overwhelmed existing infrastructure and resource

bases. Critical shortages in functional equipment 73.7% of teachers reporting low availability and consumable materials 84.2% reporting low availability have stripped the subject of essential inputs required for its delivery. The quality of teaching and learning has been profoundly eroded, reducing a practical, skills based subject to a theoretical abstraction. The finding that 57.9% of teachers rarely or never conduct practical lessons signifies a catastrophic departure from the subject's mandate, forcing a regression to lecture based methods and rendering effective assessment of practical skills nearly impossible 63.2% of teachers assessing skills to a low extent. The Theory of Change underpinning the policy is fundamentally flawed for practical subjects, as it ignored critical intermediate preconditions and triggered negative unintended pathways. The essential preconditions for quality Home Economics instruction, including manageable class sizes, adequate materials, and functional specialized facilities, were not safeguarded. The adverse effects are not uniformly distributed, with peri urban schools bearing a disproportionately heavier burden, thereby exacerbating existing educational inequalities. No peri urban school reported good infrastructure or high textbook availability, indicating that the policy has inadvertently reinforced spatial inequities. Despite systemic challenges, stakeholders have identified clear improvement strategies, with ring fenced funding and infrastructural investment being non negotiable priorities. The overwhelming identification of timely and adequate government funding 90% very important and modern laboratories 63% very important as critical measures points to the necessity of targeted, subject-specific fiscal intervention.

5.2 Conclusion

The study draws five definitive conclusions based on comprehensive analysis. First, the Free Education Policy has precipitated a severe crisis in the provision of Home Economics, transforming quantitative access into qualitative deprivation. The policy successfully expanded enrolment, as evidenced by the 87% increase in average class size, but this surge overwhelmed infrastructure and resource bases. Critical shortages in functional equipment 73.7% of teachers reporting low availability and consumable materials 84.2% reporting low availability have stripped the subject of essential inputs required for its delivery, creating a stark paradox where increased enrolment has not translated into meaningful educational opportunity. Second, the quality of teaching and learning in Home Economics has been profoundly eroded, reducing a practical, skills-based subject to a theoretical abstraction. The finding that 57.9% of teachers rarely or never conduct practical lessons signifies a catastrophic departure from the subject's mandate rooted in experiential learning. This has forced pedagogical regression to demonstration and lecture based methods, rendering effective assessment of practical skills nearly impossible for 63.2% of teachers. Third, the Theory of Change underpinning the policy is fundamentally flawed for practical subjects, as it ignored critical intermediate preconditions and triggered negative unintended pathways. The essential preconditions for quality Home Economics instruction, including manageable class sizes for supervision, adequate materials, and functional specialized facilities, were not safeguarded. Fourth, the adverse effects are not uniformly distributed, with peri urban schools bearing a disproportionately heavier burden, thereby exacerbating existing educational inequalities. No peri urban school reported good infrastructure or high textbook availability, indicating the policy has inadvertently reinforced spatial inequities. Fifth, despite systemic challenges, stakeholders have identified clear improvement strategies, with ring-fenced funding and infrastructural investment being non negotiable priorities requiring fundamental policy recalibration.

5.3 Recommendations

Based on the findings and conclusions, the study puts forward the following recommendations aligned with the three research objectives. First, to address the effect of the policy on provision, the Ministry of Education should implement a differentiated capitation grant, providing Home Economics with a funding allocation 70 to 100 percent higher than the base rate for theoretical subjects to adequately cover consumables, equipment maintenance, and facility upkeep. A ring fenced and decentralized procurement system should be established at district level, providing schools with quarterly cash transfers for timely purchases of perishable and locally available materials. Second, to improve the quality of teaching and learning, school administrators should adopt innovative timetabling with rotational practical schedules and skill station models to maximize limited equipment and space. Inter school resource sharing networks for durable equipment should be established. Teacher training institutions should revise pre service and in service programs to include mandatory modules on teaching practical subjects in resource constrained contexts, covering adaptive pedagogy, safety management in overcrowded labs, improvisation techniques, and formative assessment strategies for large classes. Professional Learning Communities for Home Economics teachers should be facilitated at district level for sharing best practices and peer support. Third, concerning improvement measures, the Ministry should launch a national infrastructure and equipment upgrade program prioritizing construction, rehabilitation, and equipping of Home Economics laboratories, with explicit focus on addressing backlogs in peri urban and rural districts. Equity audits should be integrated into policy monitoring to track resource distribution, infrastructure quality, and learning outcomes disaggregated by subject and school location. School leadership should develop strategic school community partnerships to mobilize supplementary resources and establish school gardens for low cost ingredients.

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