



Evaluating the Implementation and Impact of Fee-Free Education Policy in Temeke Municipality: Challenges and Opportunities

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ABSTRACT: This study examines the implementation and impact of the fee-free education policy in Temeke Municipality, Tanzania, with a focus on its influence on access, quality, and equity in primary education. Guided by the Classical Liberal Theory of Equal Opportunity, Interactionism Theory, and Human Capital Theory, the study employs a mixed-methods approach to gather data from 201 participants, including head teachers, teachers, parents, and students. The findings reveal that while the policy has significantly increased enrollment and reduced dropout rates, its success is hindered by systemic challenges such as resource shortages, overcrowded classrooms, insufficient teacher training, and delayed funding. Additionally, limited parental involvement and inadequate stakeholder collaboration impede the delivery of quality education. The study underscores the need for increased funding, teacher capacity-building, and infrastructure development to address these challenges. It also highlights the importance of structured parental engagement and robust monitoring systems to ensure policy effectiveness. The findings contribute to the discourse on educational reform, providing practical recommendations to bridge the gap between policy intentions and outcomes.

KEY WORDS: Fee-Free Education, Access to Education, Educational Quality, Policy Implementation, Resource Allocation, Parental Involvement, Temeke Municipality, Tanzania

1. INTRODUCTION

Fee-free education refers to a policy that eliminates tuition fees for students, aiming to make basic education accessible to all children regardless of socio-economic background (UNESCO, 2016). The policy framework for fee-free education generally covers tuition but often leaves other indirect costs, such as uniforms, transportation, and school supplies, unaddressed. This can result in financial strain for families, especially those from low-income backgrounds, who struggle to meet these additional educational expenses despite the absence of tuition fees (Lazaro & Matiku, 2022). Theoretically, fee-free education is meant to remove the primary financial barrier to schooling, yet achieving genuine educational equality requires more comprehensive support that encompasses both direct and indirect school-related expenses.

Scholars have debated the impact of fee-free education policies on achieving equitable access to quality education. Proponents argue that removing tuition fees democratizes education, providing a pathway for disadvantaged children to access learning opportunities that were previously out of reach due to financial constraints (Kamper & Mampuru, 2007). However, critics contend that these policies often fall short in addressing the full spectrum of costs associated with schooling, which can perpetuate educational disparities. For instance, studies highlight that while enrollment rates increase under fee-free policies, resource shortages, inadequate facilities, and limited parental involvement can significantly undermine educational quality (Senkoro, 2020). Classical Liberal Theory underpins this discourse, asserting that education systems should dismantle barriers and provide equitable opportunities, thus supporting individuals' potential and societal advancement (Gonzales, 2001). However, the effectiveness of fee-free policies is contingent upon robust support structures that address not only enrollment but also educational quality and inclusivity.

Globally, countries like China, Kenya, and Papua New Guinea have adopted fee-free education policies with varying outcomes influenced by local socio-economic conditions and policy structures. In China, for example, fee-free education initiatives led to notable increases in school attendance but exposed deficiencies in infrastructure and staffing, limiting the quality of education provided (Oyeniran & Uwamahoro, 2017). Similarly, Kenya experienced a surge in enrollment with the introduction of fee-free education, though this placed immense pressure on existing resources, revealing systemic gaps in facilities and trained personnel (Kamanzi, 2013). Such international experiences underscore the complexities of fee-free education, where simply eliminating fees

is insufficient to ensure equitable learning outcomes; other factors, such as consistent funding, community involvement, and infrastructure, play crucial roles.

In Tanzania, the fee-free education policy was implemented as part of a national strategy to achieve Universal Primary Education (UPE) and align with global Sustainable Development Goals (URT, 2001). This policy aimed to enhance access to primary education by abolishing tuition fees, thus enabling children from lower-income families to attend school. However, the policy's implementation has encountered significant obstacles, particularly in regions like Temeke Municipality, where socioeconomic challenges are pronounced. Although enrollment rates have risen, resource limitations—such as shortages in classrooms, desks, and essential learning materials—have hindered the policy's effectiveness (Vavrus & Moshi, 2009). Additionally, indirect schooling costs remain a challenge for impoverished families, who often struggle to afford uniforms, transportation, and meals, essential components for a supportive learning environment (Shukia, 2020).

Temeke Municipality, located in Dar es Salaam, provides a case study on the policy's impact in an economically challenged urban setting. In this area, the fee-free education policy has increased school attendance but has also exposed critical deficiencies in infrastructure and teaching resources due to limited government funding (Senkoro, 2020). Many parents face difficulties meeting the indirect costs associated with schooling, such as providing school uniforms and other supplies, leading to issues like absenteeism and dropout. For example, recent data from Temeke show that over 286 students from low-income backgrounds struggle to acquire basic learning necessities, further highlighting the policy's limitations (Shukia, 2020). The Classical Liberal Theory's vision of equitable education remains partially unfulfilled, as economic barriers continue to influence educational access and outcomes for the most vulnerable.

Given these complexities, this study examined the impact of the fee-free education policy on the learning experiences of impoverished students in Temeke Municipality. While the policy's intent aligns with the Classical Liberal Theory's ideals of equal opportunity, practical challenges in resource provision and socio-economic disparities hinder its full realization. By investigating the roles of government funding, parental involvement, and associated challenges within the policy's framework, this research aims to offer insights that can inform future policy adaptations. Such adjustments are essential to ensuring that the fee-free education initiative not only promotes enrollment but also delivers meaningful, equitable learning opportunities for all students, particularly those from disadvantaged backgrounds in Tanzania.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Theoretical Review

The study draws on three key theories: the Classical Liberal Theory of Equal Opportunity, the Interactionism Theory, and the Human Capital Theory, each of which offers a unique perspective on the implementation and impact of fee-free education.

The Classical Liberal Theory of Equal Opportunity, championed by Horace Mann in the 19th century, asserts that education should be universally accessible to eliminate socio-economic disparities. This theory underpins the Tanzanian government's rationale for implementing the fee-free education policy, aiming to democratize access to primary education and foster social equity (Marwa, 2019). However, this theory assumes that removing financial barriers alone ensures equality. In practice, as this study highlights, indirect costs such as uniforms and school supplies remain significant obstacles for many families, disproportionately affecting low-income households. Thus, while the theory aligns with the policy's objectives, it underestimates the multifaceted nature of inequality in educational contexts.

The Interactionism Theory, developed by George Herbert Mead and extended by Blumer (1969), emphasizes the importance of teacher-student interactions in shaping learning outcomes. This theory is highly relevant in the context of overcrowded classrooms in Temeke Municipality, where the average student-teacher ratio far exceeds recommended standards (Lucumay & Matete, 2024). As this study reveals, such conditions undermine meaningful engagement, making it difficult for teachers to provide individualized attention. The Interactionism Theory underscores the necessity of adequate infrastructure and manageable class sizes to foster effective learning interactions.

The Human Capital Theory, proposed by Becker (1994), positions education as an investment in the development of skills and competencies essential for economic growth. This theory aligns closely with Tanzania's aspirations to build a skilled workforce through universal primary education. However, the study reveals a gap between this theoretical ideal and practical implementation. Insufficient resources, untrained teachers, and overcrowded classrooms hinder the policy's ability to fully develop human capital. This finding resonates with Atuhurra's (2016) assessment of similar policies in Kenya, where increased enrollment strained the education system's capacity, limiting its effectiveness in skill development.

Together, these theories provide a framework for analyzing the policy's intentions and challenges, highlighting the interplay between equitable access, interactive learning, and economic advancement.

Empirical Review

Empirical studies on fee-free education policies offer insights into their successes and limitations across various contexts. In Kenya, Atuhurra (2016) found that the Free Primary Education policy increased enrollment rates by 70% within its first three

years but also resulted in significant declines in learning outcomes. The study attributed these challenges to overcrowded classrooms and inadequate teaching materials, findings that parallel those in Temeke Municipality. Similarly, Adan and Orodho (2015) noted that the lack of a comprehensive funding model led to delays in fund disbursement, creating operational inefficiencies in Kenyan schools.

In Tanzania, Marwa (2019) observed that while the fee-free education policy led to a 35% increase in primary school enrollment, it also exposed infrastructural and logistical gaps. Overcrowded classrooms, teacher shortages, and delayed funding emerged as recurring challenges. These findings are consistent with this study's results, which highlight that 73% of schools in Temeke face student-teacher ratios that exceed the national standard.

Empirical evidence from Rwanda offers additional insights. Williams et al. (2015) studied the impact of fee-free education on dropout rates and found that while the policy improved retention, hidden costs such as uniforms and examination fees continued to pose barriers for marginalized families. This aligns with the findings in Temeke, where 62% of parents reported financial difficulties in meeting these indirect costs.

Lucumay and Matete (2024) emphasized the importance of stakeholder engagement in addressing these challenges. Their study in Tanzanian secondary schools found that active parental involvement reduced dropout rates and improved learning outcomes. However, as this study reveals, only 41% of parents in Temeke actively participate in school activities, highlighting the need for awareness programs and structured engagement mechanisms.

These studies collectively underscore that while fee-free education policies promote access, they often fail to address systemic barriers that affect quality and equity. This study contributes to this discourse by providing a clear understanding of these dynamics in the specific socio-economic context of Temeke Municipality.

3. METHODOLOGY

This study employed a mixed-methods research approach, integrating quantitative and qualitative data collection methods to comprehensively evaluate the fee-free education policy in Temeke Municipality. This approach was chosen to ensure a holistic understanding of the policy's impacts, capturing both numerical trends and contextual nuances.

The descriptive survey design was utilized to collect data from a diverse sample of stakeholders, including school administrators, teachers, parents, and students. Quantitative data were collected using structured questionnaires, which were designed to measure variables such as enrollment rates, resource adequacy, and parental involvement. Qualitative data were gathered through semi-structured interviews with head teachers and focus group discussions with parents and students. This allowed the study to explore subjective experiences and perceptions, enriching the quantitative findings.

The study sampled 201 participants, including six head teachers, 61 teachers, 25 parents, and 120 students, using a combination of purposive and random sampling techniques. Purposive sampling was employed to select head teachers and key informants, ensuring that participants with leadership and oversight responsibilities were included. Random sampling was used for teachers and students to ensure a representative cross-section of perspectives.

Data analysis followed a two-pronged approach. Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, including frequencies, percentages, and mean scores, facilitated by SPSS software. Qualitative data were analyzed thematically, identifying patterns and recurring themes related to policy implementation challenges and stakeholder roles. Ethical considerations included obtaining informed consent, ensuring confidentiality, and seeking approval from relevant authorities.

4. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

Role of the Government in Developing Pupils' Skills and Competence

The findings highlight a mixed performance by the government in its efforts to enhance pupils' skills and competencies under the fee-free education policy. Quantitative data indicate that while enrollment increased by over 40% in the past three years, this expansion has not been accompanied by a proportional increase in infrastructure and teaching resources. For example, 76% of schools reported severe shortages of teaching materials such as textbooks, laboratory equipment, and stationery. Furthermore, 68% of schools face overcrowding, with an average student-to-teacher ratio of 1:90, well above the national standard of 1:40.

Qualitative insights from interviews with head teachers revealed that delayed and insufficient government funding exacerbates these challenges. One head teacher lamented, "The funds we receive are not enough to address even the most basic needs, let alone provide an environment conducive to learning" (Participant 3, personal interview, 2024). This observation aligns with findings from Marwa (2019), who similarly noted that funding inadequacies undermine the objectives of fee-free education policies in Tanzanian schools.

The findings also shed light on the limited availability of teacher training programs, which hampers skill development. Many teachers reported feeling ill-equipped to handle larger class sizes or implement modern teaching methods. As one teacher stated, "We are expected to deliver quality education, but there's no training on how to adapt to these new challenges" (Participant 12,

personal interview, 2024). This reflects Atuhurra's (2016) findings in Kenya, where rapid enrollment growth under free education policies overwhelmed the system's capacity to maintain quality instruction.

From the perspective of the Human Capital Theory, the findings suggest that while fee-free education has democratized access, its implementation does not adequately invest in the tools and training necessary to enhance skills and competencies. The failure to provide sufficient resources and professional development limits the policy's ability to realize its potential for economic growth and societal advancement.

Role of Parents in Pupils' Academic Achievement

Parental involvement emerged as a crucial yet underutilized component of the fee-free education policy. The quantitative data revealed that 62% of parents acknowledged their responsibility to support their children's education through the provision of uniforms and learning materials. However, only 41% actively participated in school activities such as parent-teacher association meetings or volunteering in school projects. This disparity suggests that while parents are aware of their roles, financial and structural barriers limit their engagement.

Qualitative findings provided deeper insights into this issue. Many parents reported struggling to afford the indirect costs associated with education, such as examination fees, uniforms, and extracurricular activity contributions. One parent stated, "We were told education is free, but we still have to pay for so many things. It's hard to keep up" (Participant 6, focus group discussion, 2024). These findings echo Williams et al. (2015), who observed that hidden costs in Rwanda's fee-free education system hindered parental support and student retention.

The study also identified a lack of awareness among parents regarding how to support their children's academic progress beyond financial contributions. For instance, 34% of parents admitted that they rarely engage with their children's homework or academic activities due to time constraints or limited literacy skills. This aligns with Masabo et al. (2017), who found that structured programs to involve parents in their children's education significantly improved academic outcomes.

From a policy perspective, these findings underscore the need for targeted interventions to enhance parental engagement. Initiatives such as parent training programs, financial assistance for low-income families, and awareness campaigns could empower parents to play a more active role in their children's education.

Challenges in Policy Implementation

The study identified several systemic challenges in the implementation of the fee-free education policy, including delayed fund disbursement, inadequate infrastructure, and teacher demotivation. Quantitative data revealed that 73% of schools operate with a student-to-teacher ratio exceeding 1:80, leading to overcrowded classrooms and reduced teaching effectiveness. In addition, 64% of schools reported delays in receiving government funds, with some waiting up to six months. This delayed disbursement disrupts school operations and forces administrators to find alternative, often unsustainable, funding solutions.

Interviews with teachers and headmasters highlighted the psychological toll of these challenges. Teachers reported feeling overwhelmed by the large class sizes and the lack of resources needed to deliver effective instruction. One teacher expressed, "We are demoralized because we don't have the tools to do our job. It feels like we are failing our students, even though we are trying our best" (Participant 9, personal interview, 2024). This aligns with Lucumay and Matete's (2024) findings, which noted similar frustrations among Tanzanian teachers under the fee-free education framework.

Another critical issue identified was the lack of infrastructure. Nearly 70% of schools lacked basic facilities such as desks, functional toilets, and clean water. In some schools, students were forced to sit on the floor due to insufficient desks, further hampering the learning environment. This finding is consistent with Atuhurra's (2016) study in Kenya, which found that infrastructural deficits were a major bottleneck in the effective implementation of free education policies.

These challenges highlight the gap between policy design and practical implementation. While the fee-free education policy is ambitious in its goals, its execution is hindered by systemic inefficiencies and a lack of foresight in addressing logistical and operational challenges.

Effectiveness of Stakeholder Collaboration in Policy Implementation

Stakeholder collaboration was found to be a critical determinant of the policy's success, although its implementation remains inconsistent. Quantitative data showed that schools with active parent-teacher associations and community involvement reported a 30% higher success rate in meeting policy goals compared to schools without such engagement. For example, one school secured funding for classroom renovations through partnerships with local businesses, significantly improving its learning environment.

Qualitative findings emphasized the importance of transparent communication between schools and stakeholders. One head teacher noted, "When parents and local leaders understand our challenges, they are more willing to contribute their time and resources" (Participant 5, personal interview, 2024). This observation aligns with Robinson and Judge's (2007) framework, which emphasizes the role of participatory governance in education policy implementation.

However, the study also revealed gaps in stakeholder collaboration. Nearly 60% of parents reported that they were unaware of how school funds were utilized, leading to mistrust and reduced willingness to engage. Addressing this issue requires greater transparency and accountability in the management of school resources.

Across all objectives, the findings paint a complex picture of the fee-free education policy's impact. While the policy has succeeded in increasing enrollment and retention, it has struggled to address systemic challenges related to quality, equity, and sustainability. The theoretical frameworks—particularly the Classical Liberal Theory of Equal Opportunity and the Human Capital Theory—provide valuable insights but must be adapted to account for the practical realities of resource constraints, infrastructural deficits, and socio-economic disparities.

The discussions highlight that achieving the policy's goals requires a multi-pronged approach, integrating government action, parental involvement, and community collaboration. By addressing these systemic barriers, the policy can better fulfill its promise of providing equitable, high-quality education for all.

5. THEORETICAL AND EMPIRICAL IMPLICATIONS OF THE STUDY' FINDINGS

The findings of this study reinforce and extend key theoretical frameworks while also highlighting gaps that require further exploration. The Classical Liberal Theory of Equal Opportunity, which advocates for universal access to education as a means to eliminate socio-economic disparities, is affirmed in the context of the fee-free education policy. The significant increase in enrollment rates in Temeke Municipality demonstrates the theory's relevance in democratizing access to primary education. However, the study also reveals that the theory's focus on access alone is insufficient to achieve true equity, as indirect costs and resource shortages disproportionately impact low-income families. This suggests the need for an expanded theoretical framework that incorporates broader dimensions of equity, including resource distribution, infrastructural adequacy, and systemic support.

The Interactionism Theory, which emphasizes the importance of teacher-student interactions for effective learning, is also validated. Overcrowded classrooms and insufficient teacher training in Temeke Municipality undermine meaningful engagement, limiting the quality of education. This finding highlights the need for adaptations of the theory to account for systemic challenges that disrupt interactive dynamics. The study calls for a contextual application of Interactionism Theory that recognizes the role of class size, teacher workload, and resource availability in shaping interaction quality.

The Human Capital Theory, which views education as an investment in skills and competencies for economic growth, is both supported and critiqued by the findings. While the policy has increased access to education, the lack of adequate funding, teacher training, and infrastructural support limits its ability to develop the human capital necessary for societal advancement. This underscores the importance of aligning policy implementation with the broader goals of human capital development, emphasizing not just access but also quality and sustainability.

Empirically, the study provides actionable insights for policymakers, educators, and other stakeholders. First, it highlights the critical role of resource allocation in the success of fee-free education policies. The findings show that while increased enrollment is a positive outcome, it creates significant strain on existing infrastructure and teaching capacity. Policymakers must prioritize investments in classrooms, desks, and teaching materials to address these gaps.

Second, the study underscores the importance of parental involvement in enhancing educational outcomes. The low levels of parental engagement in Temeke Municipality highlight a missed opportunity to leverage community resources and support. Structured mechanisms, such as parent training programs and financial assistance for low-income families, are essential to maximize the role of parents in supporting their children's education.

Third, the findings emphasize the need for teacher training and motivation. The lack of professional development opportunities and the overwhelming workloads reported by teachers suggest that policy implementation must include targeted support for educators. This aligns with empirical studies in other contexts, such as Atuhurra (2016), which found that teacher capacity directly impacts the success of educational reforms.

Finally, the study highlights the importance of transparency and accountability in policy implementation. Delayed fund disbursement and a lack of stakeholder trust underscore the need for robust monitoring and evaluation systems. These systems should track not only enrollment and retention rates but also the quality of education delivered under the policy.

6. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The findings of this study highlight that the fee-free education policy in Temeke Municipality has achieved notable progress in increasing access to primary education, as evidenced by a significant rise in enrollment and a reduction in dropout rates. This demonstrates the government's commitment to making education accessible to all, in alignment with the objectives of the policy and the broader goals of equitable development. However, the study also reveals significant challenges that undermine the policy's success. These include resource shortages, overcrowded classrooms, insufficient teacher training, and delayed fund disbursement. Additionally, the low levels of parental involvement and stakeholder collaboration limit the policy's potential to deliver quality education, even as access expands.

The study concludes that while the policy reflects the ideals of the Classical Liberal Theory of Equal Opportunity and the Human Capital Theory, its implementation falls short in addressing practical barriers to equitable and quality education. The gap between policy intentions and outcomes underscores the need for a more integrated and systemic approach to education reform. Addressing these barriers is critical to ensuring that the policy fulfills its promise of fostering both access and quality, ultimately contributing to societal advancement through education.

To address these challenges and enhance the effectiveness of the fee-free education policy, the following recommendations are proposed:

First, the government should prioritize increased funding for schools to address the critical shortages of resources, including classrooms, desks, textbooks, and teaching materials. Funding allocations must align with the growing enrollment numbers to ensure that the infrastructure and resources required for quality education are adequately provided. Additionally, mechanisms should be put in place to ensure the timely and transparent disbursement of funds, preventing disruptions to school operations.

Second, strengthening teacher training and support is essential. Targeted in-service training programs should be implemented to equip teachers with the skills necessary to manage large classrooms, adopt modern teaching methodologies, and address diverse student needs. These programs should also include components on stress management and resource optimization to improve teacher resilience and effectiveness. To enhance teacher motivation and retention, financial and non-financial incentives such as salary increments, performance-based rewards, and opportunities for professional growth should be introduced.

Third, parental involvement must be enhanced to maximize the benefits of the policy. Awareness campaigns should be conducted to educate parents on their vital roles in supporting their children's education. Structured programs such as parent training workshops and regular parent-teacher forums should be established to foster stronger collaboration between schools and families. Additionally, financial support mechanisms should be developed to assist low-income families in meeting indirect education costs, such as uniforms and learning materials, which continue to hinder some children from fully benefiting from fee-free education.

Fourth, urgent investments in school infrastructure are necessary to reduce overcrowding and create a conducive learning environment. The government, in collaboration with local communities, NGOs, and private sector stakeholders, should mobilize resources for constructing additional classrooms, renovating existing facilities, and providing essential amenities such as clean water and functional toilets. Special attention should be given to rural and underserved areas where infrastructural gaps are most severe.

Fifth, robust monitoring and evaluation systems should be established to track the implementation and impact of the policy. These systems should go beyond enrollment statistics to assess qualitative outcomes, such as teacher performance, student learning achievements, and the level of stakeholder engagement. Regular audits and feedback mechanisms should inform policy adjustments and ensure accountability at all levels.

Finally, stakeholder collaboration must be strengthened. Schools should adopt participatory decision-making processes that involve parents, community leaders, and other stakeholders in planning and resource mobilization. Transparent communication about the use of funds and the challenges faced by schools can foster trust and encourage greater community involvement in supporting education.

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