

# Challenges Associated with Fee-Free Secondary Education in Promoting Female Students' Performance in Central District Zanzibar

Shemsa O Shindano<sup>1\*</sup> George J Babune<sup>2</sup>

1. School of Education, State University of Zanzibar, P.O. Box 146, Zanzibar, Tanzania

2. Depart of Arts and Social Sciences, Karume Campus Zanzibar, Mwalimu Nyerere Memorial Academy  
P. O. Box 307 Zanzibar, Tanzania

\* E-mail of the corresponding author: [georgebabune@gmail.com](mailto:georgebabune@gmail.com)

## Abstract

This paper examined the challenges that affect the implementation of a fee-free education policy in secondary schools in Zanzibar. The paper is a mixed approach with a descriptive design whereby it employed data obtained from a total sample of 156 respondents from the Central district. The target population involved heads of schools, students, teachers and district education officers in the central district. Analysis of the data employed SPSS version 20 for the surveys and thematic analysis of the qualitative interviews. Standpoint theory was used to explore the understanding of challenges affecting the implementation of the policy. The challenges identified include financial, managerial and administrative demands, delayed disbursement of funds, inadequate teaching and learning materials, existing gender inequalities at home, inadequate support of parents in the policy implementation, deviance and unethical behaviours from both teachers and students, socio-economic factors, and non-existent special support from schools and teachers for girls with peculiar needs. Concluded that the free education policy is undeniably good towards supporting female students' performance but this contribution is marginal in the central district. Government should therefore contribute more funding to cover additional components and also enhance teachers' quality to attain the best results.

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## 1. Introduction

Education is a catalyst for social change and a requirement for the fulfilment of fundamental human rights due to its effect in improving cognitive and non-cognitive skills, increasing productivity, preparing women and men for stable, well-paid professions, and reducing the risk of social exclusion (Europe & Radford 2017). World Conference on Education for All (1990) requires countries to ensure access, and quality education for girls and remove every obstacle that hinders active participation (Watch, 2015). Recent efforts to promote education for all include the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) which was formalized in 2015 with goal 4 dedicated to providing equitable, inclusive, and quality education for all (Swedish Agency for Development Evaluation SADEV, 2010). The free education policy has however been noted to have challenges in its implementation in various countries. This research seeks to explore the challenges facing its implementation and its impact on girls' performance.

Various studies have investigated challenges faced in the implementation of free secondary education. Fulgence (2018), noted abolition of school fees can pose formidable challenges related to management and governance, quality, equity, financing, and politics. Majumba (2019) in their study found various challenges which included a delay of funds, inadequate capitation grants, a large number of students, inadequate teaching and learning materials, shortage of infrastructure, poor participation of parents and inadequate understanding of the policy, heavy workload of teachers and students poor discipline. Adan & Orodho (2015) in their study which investigated constraints in the implementation of free secondary education in Kenya found that teenage pregnancy has caused dropout which affects the enrolment and completion rates and parents' unwillingness to pay any other fees related to education. They also found that the policy too has led to overstretching of facilities such as laboratories and libraries due to the increased enrolment. Godda (2018) on the changing roles of heads of public school heads in Tanzania found that some challenges faced by school heads in managing the policy include inadequate funds to cater for the school's needs, misconceptions of parents about the policy which they think catered for all school needs and also the rapid increase in students' enrolments. Shukia (2020) in their assessment of the policy implementation of free education in Tanzania note that there are issues with the policy with confusion and misapprehension among the key policy implementers which are schools' heads and parents and also cast doubts on the narrative that the policy has promoted access. Olang'o et al. (2021) assessed the effects of free day secondary education policy on the academic performance of rural public day secondary schools in Kenya. Their study which assessed the students' capitation per year and the government's subsidy

concluded that the policy had a negative influence on rural public day secondary schools' academic performance since the affordability promoted high demand which had a significant influence on the insufficient teaching and learning facilities and the learning environment. The study by Munisi et al. (2021) in Tanzania which assessed the free secondary education policy on the quality of secondary school education found student enrollment increased which led to overcrowding, and teacher shortages with insufficient teaching and learning materials.

The paper employs the standpoint theory in understanding the challenges related to fee-free education that women students have in learning in the study area. Standpoint is a feminist theory drawn from Marxist writings. The theory gained prominence in the 1970s when feminist writers began to examine inequalities between men and women. Leading feminist Sandra Harding coined the term Standpoint theory. According to Borland (2020), the theory argues that people from an oppressed class have special knowledge and understanding which is not available to those from a privileged class. The theory also posits that knowledge is socially situated and individuals' position in society shapes what they know hence the need for individuals at the top hierarchies to consider those below the social hierarchies and marginalized in understanding social and natural problems faced. This theory is important to this study because it seeks to understand how the policy of free education as implemented has contributed to girls' performance from the perspective of all the educational stakeholders such as the girls. The limitation of this theory is its excessive focus on the oppressed which is difficult to identify sometimes.

## 2. Methodology

The study was conducted in the Central district Districtguja. This area was selected because of its poor record of students' performance including females in the national exams for a long period at the Ordinary Secondary certificate examinations according to the district education report. Four public schools were separated from this district namely Dunga Secondary school Schoolani Secondary School, Jendele Secondary School, Chwaka Secondary School and one private, which is Mahdi Istikam Secondary private school. In determining the sample size for the qualitative interviews, a list of key participants was made which comprised the district education officer, school head, teachers and parents. A total of 25 participants was therefore envisaged in the carrying out the qualitative approach.

The total sample size for this study, therefore, is 124 participants. This sample included 99 students for the quantitative approach and 25 key informants for the qualitative approach comprising district education officers, teachers and parents. Semi-structured questionnaires open and closed-ended questionnaire were used in collecting data from students where they responded to how the free education policy impact their learning, participation, and performance in school. The semi-structured and open and close-ended questionnaire allowed for the collection of detailed data that is both quantifiable for analysis and interpretation. The study employed the cross-sectional research design in studying the topic of free secondary education's influence on girls' performance. The cross-sectional design is adopted because it allows for the collection of data from many different individuals at a single point in time for comparison.

Qualitative data analysis involved the analysis of non-numeric data such as interview scripts, notes, and audio recordings among others. The thematic and content analysis is employed in analyzing qualitative interviews where data is transcribed, coded, and themes generated. This qualitative analysis was conducted for objectives related to the contribution of the policy and the challenges affecting the policy. Descriptive statistics are employed in analyzing quantitative data. The data were coded and analyzed with the help of SPSS and Excel programs. The descriptive analysis presented the results using means, percentages, and various frequency distributions such as tables, bar charts and pie charts. This analysis centred on the objectives of components and contributions of the policy.

The study used various data collection tools and methods. This was so adopted because of the need to address diversity and be able to triangulate various sources of data. The key informant interview method was used to gather qualitative data from the Education officer and head of schools. This involved face-to-face interviews that enabled the gaining of breath about the challenges affecting the implementation of the free education policy. The questionnaire survey was used to gather quantitative data using a questionnaire to inform the extent of the challenges of the free education policy on female students' performance with teachers and students as participants.

Statistical software for social sciences was used to examine the data using thematic analysis and descriptive statistics. Results were presented using both explanation-building techniques and descriptive statistics, which included frequencies and means. By using a variety of data collecting, analysis, and approach techniques, the validity was guaranteed. By conducting pilot research to verify the validity of the tools and the objectivity of the study's overall procedure in light of its predetermined objectives, reliability was also guaranteed. The study was carried out following the ethical principles of research, such as informed consent, confidentiality, and adherence to professional practice. It received approval from all necessary representatives of the Zanzibar Revolutionary Government and the Zanzibar State University.

### 3. Results and Discussion

This section presents and discusses the results of the paper. The results involve challenges of implementation of the free education policy which sought to understand the challenges affecting the free education policy implementation in Zanzibar, various questions were asked through the survey and interviews.

#### 3.1 The presence of challenges in the provision of free education in schools

Respondents' views were sought on whether there are challenges concerning the implementation of the free education policy. The responses are covered in the table below.

**Table 1: Presence of Challenges in free education policy implementation**

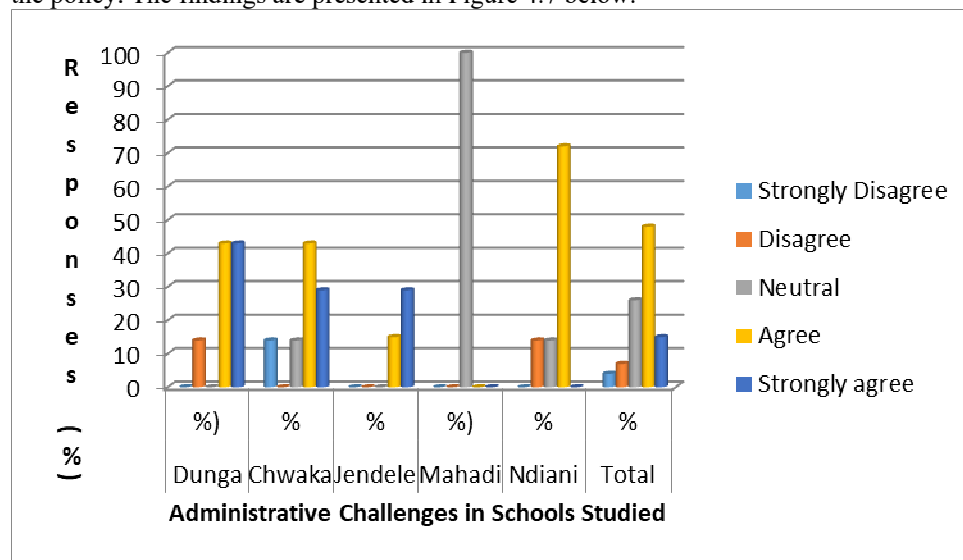
Challenges in the provision of free education in school	Dunga F (%)	Chwaka F (%)	Jendele F (%)	Mahadi F (%)	Ndijanil F (%)	Total F (%)
Disagree	1(15)	1(14)	0(0)	0(0)	0(0)	2(8)
Neutral	1(14)	2(29)	0(0)	2(100)	4(57)	9(33)
Agree	1(14)	2(29)	4(100)	0(0)	3(43)	10(37)
Strongly agree	4(57)	2(28)	0(0)	0(0)	0(0)	6(22)
<b>Total</b>	<b>7(100)</b>	<b>7(100)</b>	<b>4(100)</b>	<b>2(100)</b>	<b>7(100)</b>	<b>27(100)</b>

Source: Survey Data, 2022

As evident in Table 4.31, the majority of the teachers 10(37%) agreed to the existence of challenges in the implementation of the policy. 9(33%) of the teachers were neutral in their response on the existence of challenges, 6(22%) strongly agree to the existence of challenges and 2(8%) strongly disagree. The overall responses indicate that there are some challenges in the delivery of the free secondary education policy implementation.

#### 3.2 Financial challenges of free education provision in your school

The study sought to understand from the perspective of teachers the challenges affecting the implementation of the policy. The findings are presented in Figure 4.7 below.



**Figure 1: Teacher rating on the Availability of Financial Challenges (n=27)**

Source: Survey Data, 2022

Figure 1, presents the results. It was found out of a total of 27 respondents surveyed, 1(4%) strongly disagreed, and 2(7%) disagree. 4(26%) of the respondents were neutral, 13(48%) disagree, and 7(15%) strongly agreed to the existence of financial challenges concerning the implementation of the policy of free education. 3(43%) teachers in Dunga agree with the existence of challenges. 3(43%) in Chwaka agree to the existence of challenges, 15% agreed to the existence of challenges in Jendele, and 72% agreed to the existence of challenges in Ndiani. The general responses indicate that there is agreement among teachers on the existence of financial challenges. The findings imply that people see financial challenges concerning the policy. The result concurs with the results of Majumba (2019) who found various challenges which included a delay of funds, inadequate capitation grant, large number of students, inadequate teaching and learning materials, shortage of infrastructure, poor participation of parents and inadequate understanding of the policy, heavy workload of teachers and students poor discipline.

### 3.3 Some managerial challenges of free education provision in your school

The section intended to find out if there are managerial challenges affecting the policy implementation of free education from the teachers who are respondents. Figure 4.8 presents the results.

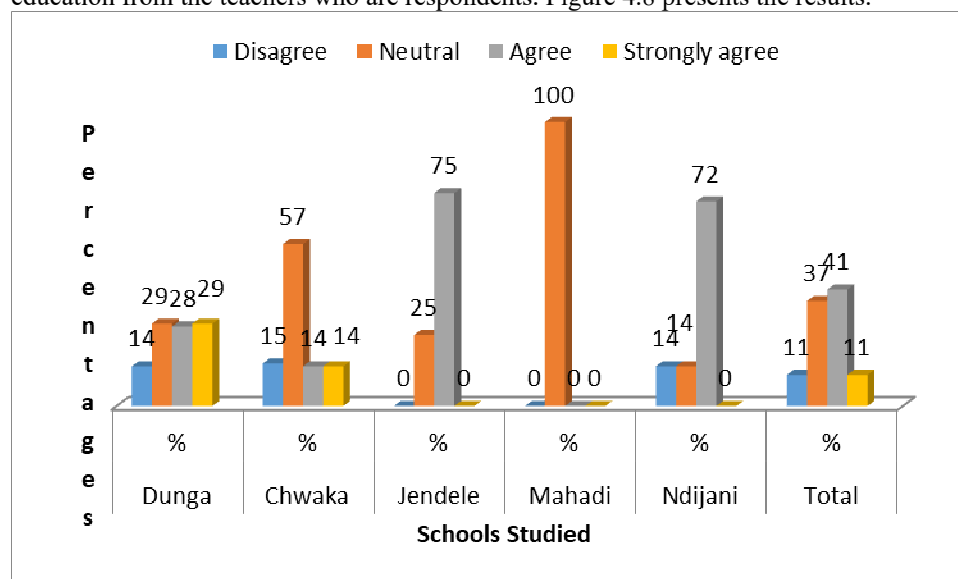


Figure 2: Teachers' Ratings on the Existence of Managerial Challenges (N=27)

Source: Survey Data, 2022

As presented in Figure 2 above, it can be observed that 3(11%) teachers disagree, 10(37%) of them were neutral, 11(41%) agree to the existence of managerial challenges, and 3(11%) also strongly agreed. Respondents indicated that; there exist managerial challenges in the implementation of the policy. The mixed views across schools ranged from neutral, agreement and strongly agreeing indicating that the policy is encountering challenges from the respondents' perspective. Unlikely Adan & Orodho (2015) in their study which investigated constraints in the implementation of free secondary education in Kenya found that the policy had led to overstretching of facilities such as laboratories and libraries due to the increased enrolment. teenage pregnancy has caused dropout which affects the enrolment and completion rates and parents' unwillingness to pay any other fees related to education. They also found that

### 3.4 Existence of administrative challenges in free education provision in school

Teachers' views were sought on whether there are administrative challenges in their schools concerning the free education policy implementation. Table 4.33 below shows the results of their agreement.

Table 2: Teachers' ratings on the existence of administrative challenges in school

The existence of administrative challenges	Dunga F (%)	Chwaka F (%)	Jendele F (%)	Mahadi F (%)	Ndijani F (%)	Total F (%)
Strongly Disagree	0(0)	1(14)	0(0)	0(0)	0(0)	1(4)
Disagree	1(14)	0(0)	0(0)	0(0)	1(12)	2(8)
Neutral	4(57)	3(43)	0(0)	2(100)	4(50)	13(48)
Agree	2(29)	2(29)	4(100)	0(0)	2(25)	9(33)
Strongly agree	0(0)	1(14)	0(0)	0(0)	1(13)	2(7)
<b>Total</b>	<b>7(100)</b>	<b>7(100)</b>	<b>4(100)</b>	<b>2(100)</b>	<b>7(26)</b>	<b>27(100)</b>

Source: Survey Data, 2022

As presented in Table 4.41 above, out of the 27 respondent teachers surveyed, 1(4%) strongly disagreed with the existence of administrative challenges. 2(8%) also disagreed. 13(48%) of the respondent were neutral on the administrative challenges that the policy is facing, 9(33%) agree that there are administrative challenges affecting the policy. The responses indicate that there are existing challenges affecting the policy of free education in Zanzibar. The study explored the interview responses on the challenges affecting the policy of free education implementation in the study area. Here is the presentation and discussion of the results of the method. These results are consistent with Fulgence's (2018), findings which revealed that the abolition of school fees can pose formidable challenges related to management and governance, quality, equity, financing, and politics.

### 3.5 Challenges Facing Free Education Policy

#### 3.5.1 Delayed disbursement of funds and inadequate teaching and learning materials

Responses from school heads and DEOs also note that though the policy benefits from the support of the

Zanzibar Improvement of Students Prospect Project, the delay in the disbursement of funds affects the implementation of the policy.

As one respondent noted:

The 15 dollars does not come on time for disbursement to schools, The ZISP project delays the payment which affects the mobilization of resources for the printing of exam material. This situation causes schools to ask to contribute sometimes towards the conducting of terminal exams since the school cannot do anything without the disbursement.

The above response indicates that schools sometimes do obtain the funds necessary towards the policy implementation which compels students to incur extra costs towards their learning.

Another challenge under this theme is the lamentation by teachers on the inadequate teaching and learning materials which can also be attributed to the delay in distribution. This challenge sometimes affects the motivations of teachers and their delivery. Fulgence (2018), also noted the existence of financial challenges as a result of the abolition of school fees.

### **3.5.2 Existing Inequalities between Boys and Girls**

Interviews conducted with teachers and students indicate that some challenges still affecting the policy output are the unequal treatment of both boys and girls which affects their participation in school and performance. As the teacher notes in the interview

“There is still gender discrimination within the communities. Girls for example still participate in rites for womanhood which prevent them from participating in the education system or school as envisaged by the free education policy. (School teacher from school A)

Also related to the above is the existence of early marriage; As the teacher from school B notes during the interview session.

"Girls have to either stop school sometimes or combine the role of students who are also married. These two circumstances impact the realization of the policy objective since students are not able to participate fully in school due to the additional challenge of taking care of their husbands and household responsibilities. These demands also enable some students to drop out hence causing a challenge."

Also related to this theme are the overburdening household chores. As students from school B notes:

All the work activities at home (house chores) are done by me which affects the time I use for the revision of my notes at home before the next day of school.

As another student notes;

I do have not enough time sometimes for revision since I have to fetch water for the house and also help in preparing food. This causes tiredness and lateness when I decide to learn.

The above revelations reveal that parents are unable to allocate time for revision by girls at home. This indicates that chores at home are tilted towards girls which affects the gender balance in home activities and the corresponding impact on girls learning and performance.

### **3.5.3 Inadequate Support of Parents**

Interviews conducted also found that parents are not supporting fully in achieving high performance of girls in the schools even as the policy of free education is being implemented. Interview responses found the following;

Parents are not able to support their children to achieve their potential. This is understandable because some of them are divorced, while others don't know the importance of education. Some parents are also poor so they are not able to support their children in terms of some basic needs.

Another response from the teacher note that:

The awareness of some parents is also low which affects the importance attached to education in the district. They still have the traditional belief that education is not for girls but rather to prepare them for marriage and serving their husbands.

Another respondent noted that.

The impact of poverty on some parents makes it difficult to support their children. Some of them are poor and cannot provide for all the children. Some are also sick in some cases and are not able to readily support their children as expected which affects their learning and performance.

Interviews conducted also indicate that parents do not bother to follow up on their girls and check what they do in school such as how they work hard or how they perform poorly. Since parents' involvement is important towards students' achievement in school, parents' participation in school meetings and follow-up on girls' school activities could contribute to girls' performance since they will be encouraged on studying hard but that's not the case presently in the central district.

The results under this theme indicate that parents are not able to support their children at home which also

affects their participation in school and performance. This is manifest in low apathy and concern of parents, attaching less importance to children's education, divorce, sickness, and traditional belief on the non-importance of girls' education among others. The results link to Godda (2018) who found that there were misconceptions of parents about the policy which they think catered for all school needs and also the rapid increase in students' enrolments.

#### **3.5.4 Deviance and unethical behaviour**

Some interview and survey responses were also themed under deviance and bad behaviour which affects the implementation of the policy of free education in the central district. Interview responses indicate the following;

Some girls are not able to perform even as there is free education due to peer pressure from their colleagues and indulging in bad behaviours. They also excessively use technology such as phones and social media which takes their learning time and affects their participation and performance (Teacher, 1).

Another respondent noted that:

Some students including girls engage in love and sexually related activities and behaviours with the idea of enjoying their adolescence. These exposures affect their learning since they become occupied with love and relationships and lose interest in some subjects and also become truants. It becomes worse if someone breaks their heart (Teacher, 2).

Interview responses also found the amorous relationship between teachers and female students in some cases which affects students' performance and achievement in school. As one respondent who is a student note:

I feel ashamed due to some male teachers asking for love from students (they convince students to love). Teachers sometimes convince students to love but non-acceptance by the student will invite very harsh treatment from the teacher. This treatment includes the teacher becoming very strict with you.

The above responses indicate that students engage in other deviant or unethical behaviours in some cases which affect their participation and performance. This includes peer pressure demands, addiction and abuse of technology, love relationships, and teachers making advances towards female students for love are among some of the issues covered under this theme.

#### **3.5.5 Socioeconomic factors**

Some responses were themed under socio-economic factors since it was observed these factors impact the learning and performance of girls and present a challenge to the achievement of the policy of free education. As some respondent notes;

Some houses do not have electricity which affects students learning. Some parents are also divorced which affects students.

Other student remarks that:

The money given to me by my parents is not enough. This affects my ability to buy some books that are necessary for my learning in school.

The above statements which are similar to other responses from students suggest that some parents give less money to children due to their limited economic situation or they think free education has absorbed them from making any contribution towards children's education. Olang'o et al. (2021) concluded that the policy of free education had a negative influence on rural public day secondary schools' academic performance since the affordability promoted high demand which had a significant influence on the insufficient teaching and learning facilities and the learning environment. Hence, the influence of socio-economic factors in education policy.

#### **3.5.6 Non-existence of special support from school and teachers**

Students also lament the unavailability of special support from the school in situations where they encounter peculiar challenges. As the respondents' notes

No consideration of what girls' students need and our decision is not respected. For example, when you miss a lesson due to menstruation or other need, the teacher will not consider that you missed the lessons and they will not help you cover the lesson you missed. They resume the lessons normally for everybody without consideration of individual needs when girls missed class.

The above indicates that girls are not supported when they face particular issues relating to health such as menstruation which can impact their learning since teachers are not able to cover lessons when students miss class with this having an impact on their performance.

Students also note that the keeping of boarding schools to reward those students who passed exams excellently excludes several girls who have to move from home every day to stay. This special treatment impacts girls negatively and also affects their girls and their performance.

Analysis of the data towards the research objective which examined the challenges affecting the policy found the following: challenges related to the financial, managerial and administrative management of the free education policy, delay in the disbursement of funds and inadequate learning materials, existing inequalities

between boys and girls at home which affect the policy, inadequate support of parents in the policy implementation, deviance and unethical behaviour from some students and teachers, socio socio-economics, and non-existent special support from school and teachers towards girls in peculiar need.

#### 4. Conclusion

The paper reveals some challenges that influence the practice of free education including financial 13 (48%), managerial with 3 (11%) evidence of strongly agreeing and 11 (41%) evidence of agreeing and administrative with 9 (33%) evidence of agreeing and 2 (7%) evidence of strongly agreeing. The study, therefore, concludes that education is not completely free since other others are involved indirectly. The research found that the policy contributes to female students' performance due to the conducive environment the policy helps to create such as avail the ability of teachers and class spaces for learning, spacious classes to reduce overcrowding, and improved learning facilities and teaching materials. The study, therefore, concludes that several factors and components within the free education policy contribute to girls' performance.

#### 4.1 Recommendations

The study recommends that school management and authority make provision for girls who face enormous burdens about cleanliness and hygiene while also offering their support when students face peculiar challenges. Providing special lessons for students who miss class due to menstrual periods and other related health issues would help all students to participate and achieve. Also, based on the findings of this study, it is recommended that parents support the government in the realization of the policy objectives such as supporting school development efforts and supporting in breaking the circles of gender inequality due to the overburdening of girls at home with chores. Furthermore, the study recommends that teachers should be supported by governments in ways such as increased remuneration and continued professional development towards improving their teaching since these can boost teacher commitment and expertise in supporting students towards their performance.

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