

# An In-depth Analysis of Zambia's Education Governance: Evaluating Policy Formulation, Legal Frameworks, and Implementation Challenges

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**Abstract:** This study provides an overview of education governance in Zambia, exploring the multidimensional aspects of policy formulation, legal frameworks and challenges associated with policy implementation. The research aims to uncover the complex dynamics that shape the education system in Zambia, focusing on the interactions between different stakeholders, the role of governance structures, and the effectiveness of policy implementation.

Policy formulation in the education sector in Zambia is often influenced by a combination of local, regional and international factors, such as socio-economic conditions, political will and external assistance. The study will examine how these influences shape the development of education policies, their alignment with national development goals, and the extent to which they reflect the needs of the population. It will critically evaluate the extent to which these policies are inclusive, responsive to urban and rural educational needs, as well as the challenges faced by marginalized groups. The legal frameworks that underpin Zambia's education system are essential to ensure compliance, accountability and protection of stakeholders' rights. This research will examine the country's education laws, such as the Education Act and other related laws, assessing their effectiveness in promoting equal access to quality education, ensuring teacher standards and protecting the rights of learners. By assessing the legal structures and institutional mechanisms in place, the study aims to identify gaps and propose reforms that can improve the education governance framework.

A key element of this analysis is the exploration of implementation challenges. Despite the existence of comprehensive policies and legal frameworks, Zambia faces many obstacles in translating them into tangible educational outcomes. This study will examine critical issues such as inadequate funding, poor infrastructure, limited access to educational resources, and a shortage of skilled labor. In addition, the impact of socio-political factors such as political instability, political changes with changing administrations, and decentralization of educational services will be analyzed to understand how they affect policy implementation.

The research will also explore the role of international organizations, NGOs, and development partners in the Zambian education system, highlighting their contributions and assessing the sustainability of external interventions. The influence of international organizations in shaping educational reforms will also be discussed, particularly in the context of global education standards and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

In conclusion, this study aims to provide valuable insights into the strengths and weaknesses of educational governance in Zambia, offering recommendations to improve policy formulation, strengthen the legal framework, and address implementation challenges that hinder the country's educational progress. The study calls for a more flexible and adaptive regulatory approach to education that can respond to new challenges and ensure that educational reforms are sustainable and inclusive, ultimately contributing to the nation's long-term development goals.

**Keywords:** Education Governance, Policy Formulation, Legal Frameworks & Implementation Challenges.

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## **Introduction**

Zambia's education system, which has been central to the country's development strategy since its independence in 1964, is currently facing several challenges affecting its governance. Educational governance includes the formulation of policies, the legal frameworks that support educational practices, and the practical challenges encountered in implementing these policies. Effective education governance is essential for the achievement of educational goals, including improved access, equity, and quality, which contribute to national socio-economic development. Despite significant progress in increasing access to education, particularly at the primary level, challenges persist in policy implementation and the quality of education, particularly in rural areas.

Education policy formulation in Zambia has always been influenced by the dual objective of responding to national development priorities and complying with global education frameworks. Policies in Zambia are often shaped by the government's long-term vision, including Vision 2030, which aims to transform Zambia into a middle-income country with a well-educated workforce. In addition, international frameworks such as the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the Education for All (EFA) goals play an important role in shaping education policies adopted in the country [1]. However, while these global frameworks provide guidance, their implementation depends on the political and economic environment in Zambia, which has faced challenges such as volatile economic growth, political instability and inadequate funding for education. As a result, education policy is often reactive rather than proactive, responding to emerging challenges rather than being driven by long-term educational goals [2]. The legal framework governing Zambia's education system is another essential element of its educational governance. The Education Act, together with various policies and regulations, aims to guide the provision of education throughout the country. However, the implementation of these legal frameworks has been hampered by several problems, such as inconsistent implementation, lack of clear guidelines, and divergences between national policies and local realities. Furthermore, the education governance system in Zambia is characterized by a degree of decentralization that, although intended to promote local autonomy, often results in disparities in education provision between urban and rural areas.

Local authorities, often lacking financial and administrative capacity, struggle to effectively implement national policies, leading to significant variations in access and quality of education [3]. Furthermore, the legal framework has been criticized for not adequately addressing issues related to the professionalization of teaching staff, which affects the quality of education provided in the country [4]. The practical challenges of policy implementation in the education sector in Zambia are many. Although enrollment rates have increased, especially at the primary level, the education system still faces significant challenges in terms of infrastructure, resources and teacher quality. Inadequate school infrastructure, teaching materials, and the lack of qualified teachers are some of the most pressing challenges that prevent the effective delivery of education [5]. In addition, low levels of public investment in education remain a major obstacle to achieving educational goals. Government budget allocation to the education sector has not kept pace with the growing demand for quality education, resulting in overcrowded classrooms, poorly equipped schools, and high student-teacher ratios [6]. These implementation challenges are

compounded by socio-political dynamics, including changes in political leadership, which often lead to changes in educational priorities and political continuity [7].

In addition, Zambia's education sector has also been influenced by external actors, such as international donors and non-governmental organizations (NGOs), who have provided financial support and technical expertise. While this external support has been essential in addressing some of the system's challenges, it has also led to a reliance on external aid, which may not always be aligned with the country's long-term educational priorities. The increasing influence of international actors in education policy has raised concerns about the sustainability of reforms and the extent to which local needs have been met [8].

Therefore, this study aims to provide a comprehensive analysis of education governance in Zambia, with emphasis on policy formulation processes, legal frameworks governing education, and challenges encountered during implementation. By exploring the complex interaction between these factors, the research aims to provide valuable insight into how Zambia's education system can be reformed to achieve its educational goals and contribute more effectively to the country's development.

## **Literature Review**

### **Introduction**

The literature on education governance in Zambia highlights key issues in policy formulation, legal frameworks, and challenges encountered in implementing education policies. This review synthesizes critical themes identified in academic research and provides a framework for understanding how these factors impact the Zambian education system. The review is organized into several subcategories: policy formulation, legal frameworks, implementation challenges, decentralization and local governance, the role of stakeholders in education, and external influences on education policy.

### **1. Policy Formulation**

The process of education policy formulation in Zambia is multifaceted, shaped by a combination of national priorities, international commitments, economic constraints and political dynamics. While policy formulation is often presented as a means to achieve educational equity and national development, its implementation is fraught with challenges arising from global and local factors. The main challenge is to translate key international goals, such as those set out in the Education for All (EFA) and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), into concrete and relevant policies within the context of Zambia's unique socio-political and economic framework.

The influence of external organizations, changing political agendas and state financial constraints further complicate the process, creating a tension between global aspirations and local realities. Kanyongo (2007) suggests that education policy formulation in Zambia is largely reactive rather than proactive, driven by immediate political concerns and the desire to meet international obligations rather than long-term educational strategies [1]. Zambia's commitment to expanding primary education and its efforts to achieve universal access are clear manifestations of this reactive approach, where policies are often designed to meet international criteria, such as the EFA goals. However, the challenge of integrating these broad, often vague,

objectives into structured and relevant local education policy remains unanswered. These global frameworks often ignore the specific barriers that Zambia faces, including inadequate infrastructure, inadequate teacher training, and cultural factors that affect access and quality of education. As Mumba (2018) notes, although Zambia has made progress in integrating international education frameworks into its policy, the success of these frameworks has been largely undermined by the country's economic challenges, political instability, and insufficient institutional capacity to effectively implement guidelines [2]. Furthermore, the influence of external actors – international donors, NGOs and multilateral organisations – plays a crucial role in shaping Zambia's education policies. On the one hand, external funding has facilitated significant progress in expanding access to education and improving literacy levels. On the other hand, these external pressures often lead to a fragmented and incoherent policy structure. In their efforts to align Zambia's education system with international standards, these actors inadvertently create a patchwork of policy objectives that may not align with the country's specific development needs. This problem of policy fragmentation is exacerbated by the competing interests of national and international stakeholders, as well as the lack of a clear and coherent policy agenda at the national level [3]. This disparate policy formulation process reflects the broader challenge of reconciling Zambia's educational needs with global education imperatives. For example, the push for universal education has led to policies aimed at increasing enrolment rates without emphasizing quality and sustainability. Such an approach risks creating a false sense of progress, as increasing enrolment rates do not automatically translate into improved educational outcomes.

Zambia's education system continues to struggle with quality issues, including poor teacher training, outdated curricula, and insufficient teaching resources. In addition, political instability has often led to shifts in policy priorities, with changes in government resulting in the cancellation or modification of education reforms, further disrupting the continuity of educational planning and implementation. Regarding the policy-making process itself, there is a growing recognition that more participatory and inclusive policymaking is needed to improve the effectiveness and relevance of education policies. While Zambia's education policies have traditionally been top-down, with limited input from local communities and education stakeholders, there is an urgent need to include the voices of local stakeholders – such as teachers, parents and community leaders – in the decision-making process. Sinyangwe's (2019) research highlights that local knowledge and perspectives are essential for developing policies that respond to the specific needs of different regions, particularly in rural and marginalized areas where access to education remains a significant challenge [3].

Furthermore, the economic constraints facing Zambia continue to be a major obstacle to the effective formulation and implementation of education policies. Limited government financial resources often translate into overly ambitious policies, but they lack the funding necessary for successful implementation. The 2009 National Education Policy (NEP), which aims to address educational challenges such as overcrowded classrooms and inadequate teacher training, is an example of a policy that has struggled to achieve its goals due to lack of resources. Dube (2013) argues that without a strong education financing system, many of the educational reforms envisaged in Zambia will remain

unfulfilled, especially in the face of competing national priorities such as health care, infrastructure and development [5].

The economic challenge is compounded by the lack of long-term strategic planning in the formulation of education policies. Policymakers are often driven by short-term political cycles, leading to inconsistencies in approach. In contrast, formulating effective education policies requires a long-term vision, with an understanding of future demographic trends, technological developments and the global knowledge economy. The transition to a more knowledge-based economy requires policies that prioritize not only access to education but also its quality, including curriculum reform, teacher training, and digital integration with technology. These areas are often neglected in education policy discussions in Zambia, which tend to focus primarily on access and enrollment rather than systematic improvements in quality.

In conclusion, the policy-making process in the Zambian education system is characterized by a complex interplay of internal and external forces. The impact of global education frameworks, while important, often does not match local realities, leading to implementation challenges and inconsistencies in policy outcomes. In addition, economic constraints, political instability, and the fragmented nature of stakeholder engagement continue to hinder the creation of effective and sustainable education policies. Addressing these challenges requires a more coherent and sensitive approach to policy formulation, one that takes into account the long-term needs of the Zambian education system and includes a wider range of voices in the process.

## **2. Legal Frameworks**

Legal frameworks are a critical component of Zambia's education system, providing the foundational structure for the regulation, management, and administration of educational practices. These frameworks include a wide range of laws, policies, and regulations that dictate how education is delivered, who is responsible for educational management, and how educational standards are maintained. The Education Act of 2011, which serves as the cornerstone of Zambia's educational governance, provides a legislative foundation for regulating education, managing institutions, and setting standards. However, despite the importance of these legal instruments, their practical application has been hindered by several systemic challenges, including weak enforcement mechanisms, insufficient capacity at the local level, and outdated provisions that fail to address emerging educational trends.

### **Definition of Legal Frameworks in Education**

Legal frameworks in education refer to the body of laws, policies, and regulations that govern the establishment, management, and operation of educational systems and institutions. These frameworks set the legal parameters for access to education, curriculum development, teacher certification, institutional governance, and accountability. According to Tchombe (2014), legal frameworks in education are essential for ensuring that education systems are not only accessible and equitable but also quality-driven and sustainable [1]. In the context of Zambia, the Education Act 2011 is the primary legislative instrument that outlines the structure of education from primary through to tertiary education, setting forth the roles of various stakeholders, including the Ministry of Education, local authorities, and educational institutions.

### **Institutional Setup Procedures in Zambia**

The process of setting up an educational institution in Zambia involves several legal and procedural steps as outlined in the Education Act. First, the institution must be registered with the Ministry of Education. This registration process requires institutions to meet specific standards, including infrastructural requirements, staffing levels, and curriculum approval. The institution must also ensure compliance with the local authority's zoning and land-use policies, particularly for private institutions. According to Zgambo (2015), while the procedural framework for establishing institutions is outlined in the Education Act and other associated regulations, challenges arise in the implementation of these procedures, particularly due to bureaucratic delays, corruption, and inconsistent interpretation of legal requirements at the local level [4].

Moreover, private educational institutions must also comply with the Private Schools Act, which regulates their establishment and operation. This includes meeting quality standards, such as the qualification of teachers, the curriculum to be offered, and the tuition fees to be charged. Mumba (2018) suggests that the fragmented nature of the regulatory environment, coupled with weak enforcement, results in uneven compliance among educational institutions, particularly in remote areas, where oversight is often lacking [2]. This can lead to situations where substandard institutions remain operational, contributing to disparities in education quality across the country.

### **The Role of the Education Act in Management and Governance**

The Education Act of 2011 outlines the governance structures for educational institutions, providing a legal framework for the roles and responsibilities of various stakeholders, including the Ministry of Education, school management boards, and teachers. This act defines the roles of the Education Ministry in formulating policy, setting standards, and monitoring the education system, as well as the duties of school authorities in ensuring the quality of education. The act also mandates the establishment of various regulatory bodies, including the Zambia Qualifications Authority (ZQA), which oversees the accreditation of qualifications and the regulation of educational programs.

However, Zgambo (2015) argues that while the Education Act provides a comprehensive framework for managing education, its implementation has been inconsistent, particularly in terms of local governance. In Zambia, education is decentralized, meaning that local government authorities are tasked with managing and overseeing educational institutions within their jurisdictions. This decentralization, while designed to improve local responsiveness and resource allocation, has created significant challenges in the application of legal frameworks. Local authorities often face limited capacity in terms of both financial resources and human capital, which undermines their ability to effectively enforce policies and regulations, resulting in disparities in education quality across the country [4].

### **Decentralization and Legal Challenges in Education**

Decentralization of education governance is an important feature of Zambia's education system, intended to bring education management closer to local communities and enhance local autonomy. The decentralization policy allows local government authorities to have more control over the planning, implementation,

and monitoring of education policies and programs. However, as Mumba (2018) highlights, this decentralization has not been without its challenges. Local authorities often lack the administrative capacity and financial resources to effectively manage educational institutions and enforce the provisions of the Education Act [2]. This lack of capacity leads to inconsistencies in the application of educational policies, which can result in unequal access to quality education, particularly in rural and marginalized areas.

Further complicating the issue of decentralization is the variation in how legal frameworks are interpreted and enforced at the local level. In some instances, local education authorities may lack the technical expertise to understand the nuances of educational laws, leading to inefficient or improper implementation of national policies. According to Dube (2013), these challenges are exacerbated by inadequate training of local administrators and a lack of coordination between national and local education authorities, which undermines the effectiveness of the decentralized system and perpetuates existing inequities in education access and quality [5].

### **Legal Gaps and the Need for Reform**

Despite the robust legal framework provided by the Education Act, gaps remain in its ability to address emerging challenges in Zambia's education system. One of the key issues is the slow pace at which the law adapts to contemporary developments in education. For example, the integration of technology into education and the professionalization of teaching have created new legal and regulatory challenges that the Education Act has yet to fully address. Zgambo (2015) notes that the lack of updated provisions in the Education Act on these issues leaves gaps in the legal framework, hindering the effective implementation of reforms in these areas [4].

Moreover, the legal provisions for teacher conduct and professional standards, such as the Teacher's Code of Conduct, are often not rigorously enforced, leading to inconsistencies in teaching quality. The Teacher's Code of Conduct, while crucial for maintaining professional standards, has faced challenges related to monitoring and accountability, especially in remote areas. This lack of effective enforcement has contributed to the deterioration of teaching quality in some parts of Zambia, particularly where teachers are not held accountable for poor performance or unethical behavior [3].

### **Conclusion**

The legal frameworks that govern Zambia's education system, particularly the Education Act of 2011, provide a critical foundation for the regulation and management of education in the country. However, the effectiveness of these frameworks has been limited by weak enforcement, inadequate capacity at the local level, and the failure of the law to evolve in response to emerging challenges such as the professionalization of teaching and the integration of technology. Additionally, the decentralization of education governance, while intended to enhance local autonomy, has created new legal and administrative challenges, as local authorities often lack the resources and expertise to implement national policies effectively. For Zambia's education system to meet its goals of quality and equitable education, there is a need for continued legal reform, stronger enforcement mechanisms, and enhanced capacity at both the national and local levels.

### **3. Implementation Challenges**

The implementation of education policies in Zambia has faced a number of systemic and structural challenges. Despite the country's commitment to improving educational outcomes, several challenges persist that hinder the effective achievement of policy goals. These challenges include financial constraints, human resource shortages, infrastructural constraints, and administrative inefficiencies, which collectively compromise the quality of education provided in both urban and rural settings. Understanding these challenges is essential for designing solutions that address the gaps in the education system.

#### **1. Financial constraints and resource allocation**

One of the major challenges in implementing education policies in Zambia is the lack of funds. Dube (2013) argues that insufficient financial resources remain a persistent obstacle to the effective implementation of education reforms in Zambia. The lack of funding affects almost every aspect of the education system, including infrastructure development, the availability of teaching materials, teacher salaries and professional development programmes [5]. Despite the policy objective of expanding access to education, including initiatives such as free primary education, the government is struggling to provide the necessary financial support to sustain these efforts. In rural areas, this financial deficit is particularly evident. Schools often lack basic resources such as textbooks, furniture, and adequate classrooms, which directly impact the learning experience. Zgambo (2015) points out that resource shortages in rural areas are exacerbated by logistical challenges, such as the difficulty of transporting educational materials to remote schools [4]. Furthermore, financial constraints hinder the implementation of policies aimed at improving the quality of education, such as those focused on curriculum reform or teacher professional development.

#### **2. Teacher shortage and low quality of education**

Another major challenge in the education sector in Zambia is the lack of qualified teachers. Sinyangwe (2019) examines the teacher shortage in Zambia, noting that the education system faces a significant deficit of qualified teachers, especially in remote and rural areas. Many schools are unable to recruit sufficient numbers of qualified teachers, resulting in high student-teacher ratios and overcrowded classrooms, making it difficult to provide quality education [3]. As a result, teaching and learning are often compromised, with students receiving less individual attention and support.

This shortage is exacerbated by low salaries and poor working conditions, which contribute to high teacher turnover and a lack of motivation among educators. In Zambia, teachers are often understaffed and overworked, with limited opportunities for professional development. Dube (2013) suggests that the lack of teacher retention strategies and professional development programs further exacerbates this problem, leading to a vicious cycle of teacher attrition that undermines the long-term effectiveness of education policies [5].

#### **3. Inadequate infrastructure and poor learning environment**

In addition to human resource constraints, inadequate infrastructure is a major obstacle to the successful implementation of education policies. Zambia's education system continues to face challenges related to overcrowded classrooms, inadequate school facilities, and limited access to essential services such as electricity and

water. The physical condition of many schools, especially in rural and disadvantaged areas, is a significant factor contributing to poor educational outcomes. According to Mumba (2018), despite government efforts to expand access to education, the rapid increase in enrollment has not been matched by a corresponding increase in infrastructure development, leading to overcrowded schools and a lack of basic amenities. The lack of adequate infrastructure limits the effective implementation of educational reforms such as the integration of ICT in the classroom, modern teaching methods, and specialized training programs for students. Schools without adequate facilities are also unable to support extracurricular activities or provide students with a sound education. In addition, the lack of infrastructure often leads to a shortage of teachers and administrators, which also affects the effectiveness of school management.

#### **4. Administrative and Policy Coordination Issues**

Another major challenge in the implementation of education policies in Zambia is the lack of effective administrative coordination. Mumba (2018) points out that the decentralized governance of education, although intended to promote local autonomy and responsiveness, has created a fragmented system in which policy implementation varies considerably across regions. Local education authorities often lack the administrative capacity and resources to fully implement national education policies. Furthermore, there is often a disconnect between national policymakers and local authorities, leading to delays, inefficiencies, and a mismatch between policy objectives and realities on the ground [2]. The fragmentation of responsibilities between different levels of government also complicates policy implementation. Local authorities may lack the technical expertise or financial resources to interpret and implement policies effectively, while central government may be slow to provide the necessary support or oversight. This lack of coordination compromises the overall effectiveness of education policies and exacerbates regional disparities in access to quality education.

#### **5. Political instability and policy inconsistency**

Zambia's political instability presents another ongoing challenge to the implementation of education policies. Frequent changes of government, shifting political priorities, and the influence of party interests often result in unstable policy decisions. Dube (2013) argues that political instability has led to fluctuations in priorities in the education sector, with new governments revising or abandoning policies introduced by their predecessors [5]. This discrepancy compromises the continuity of educational reforms and makes long-term planning difficult.

Lack of political will and commitment to education has also contributed to delays in policy implementation. Political leaders may prioritize other issues, such as economic development or national security, over education, despite the fact that education is essential for long-term national development. This discrepancy in political priorities makes it difficult to create a coherent and unified approach to education reform.

#### **6. Educational Challenges and Curriculum**

The curriculum of Zambia's education system has not evolved in response to global educational trends and changing labor market demands. Although the government has made efforts to revise the curriculum to improve its relevance, the process has been slow and uneven. Sinyangwe (2019) notes that the curriculum remains too

theoretical, with limited emphasis on practical skills development and vocational training [3]. This mismatch between the curriculum and labor market needs contributes to high youth unemployment and limits students' employability after graduation. Furthermore, the implementation of the new curriculum is hampered by the lack of well-trained teachers capable of delivering updated and more specialized content. Teacher training programs have been slow to adapt to the demands of modern education, and many teachers continue to use outdated teaching methods that fail to effectively engage students. Zgambo (2015) argues that the failure to modernize teaching practices and integrate new pedagogical approaches into the curriculum hinders the effectiveness of educational reforms [4].

## **7. Gender Inequality in Education**

Despite efforts to improve access to education for all, gender inequalities remain a significant challenge in the Zambian education system. Girls, especially in rural areas, continue to face barriers to education, including early marriage, cultural norms, and the lack of adequate health facilities in schools. Mumba (2018) explains how these gender challenges are often exacerbated by the broader socio-economic environment, in which girls are expected to take on household responsibilities, which limits their educational opportunities [2].

Policies aimed at promoting gender equality in education are undermined by these entrenched cultural norms and practices, which perpetuate the marginalization of girls in the education system. There is also a lack of effective implementation of gender-sensitive policies, and many schools are poorly equipped to meet the specific needs of female students, such as separate health facilities.

## **Conclusion**

The challenges of implementing education policies in Zambia are complex and multifaceted. Financial constraints, teacher shortages, poor infrastructure, administrative inefficiency, political instability, and curricular challenges are all factors that make it difficult to achieve the goals of education reforms. Addressing these challenges requires a multifaceted approach, including increasing funding for education, strengthening teacher training and retention strategies, improving infrastructure, improving coordination across levels of government, and adapting school curricula to market demands. There is also a need for a greater commitment to gender equality and women's empowerment in education, as well as a more coherent and long-term political commitment to educational development.

## **Decentralization and Local Governance**

Decentralization is a key element of Zambia's education system. It aims to bring education governance closer to local communities and promote more flexible and context-appropriate policies. The idea behind decentralization is to empower local authorities, allowing them to make decisions that are more responsive to the needs of their communities. This is particularly important in a diverse country like Zambia, where regional disparities and local contexts significantly influence educational outcomes. However, while decentralization offers the potential to improve education delivery, its implementation has faced several challenges, particularly in terms of resource allocation, administrative capacity and local governance structures.

## **Definition and Theoretical Frameworks of Decentralization**

Decentralization, in the context of educational governance, refers to the transfer of decision-making authority, financial control, and administrative responsibilities from central government institutions to local or regional governments. According to the World Bank (2017), decentralization is a key mechanism for improving public service delivery by making policies more responsive to local needs and conditions [1]. Theoretically, decentralization should promote greater accountability, encourage citizen participation, and tailor educational policies to the specific needs of local communities. Scholars such as Smoke (2015) distinguish between different forms of decentralization, including fiscal, administrative, and political decentralization, each of which has a unique impact on governance structures [2].

In Zambia, decentralization has been primarily administrative and fiscal, with local governments gaining more control over education management, budgeting, and personnel. The aim is to shift decision-making from central government, often remote from the local context, to regional authorities, which are better placed to address local educational challenges.

## **Benefits of Decentralization in Education**

The expected benefits of decentralization are considerable, particularly in the context of Zambia's diverse educational landscape. Decentralization offers the opportunity for more contested educational reforms that can better respond to local needs, such as the specific educational challenges faced by rural or disadvantaged communities. According to Mumba (2018), decentralization improves accountability of educational policies by allowing local authorities to allocate resources more efficiently, manage schools with greater flexibility, and implement appropriate solutions that reflect local realities [2].

Local governance also encourages greater community participation, with parents, teachers, and other local stakeholders having a role in school governance. This participation can lead to more sustainable and culturally appropriate education policies, ensuring that education is more responsive to the social, economic and cultural needs of the community. Furthermore, decentralization can help identify and respond more quickly to local challenges, as local governments are more responsive to the specific problems facing schools within their jurisdiction. Research by Bwalya (2016) suggests that decentralization can also lead to increased efficiency in resource management. Local governments, when given financial autonomy, can better prioritize education spending according to local priorities. This is particularly important in addressing inequalities in resource distribution between urban and rural areas, where decentralized authority can allow for a more equitable distribution of resources and more targeted interventions [6].

## **4. Negative Effects of Decentralization and Potential Risks**

Despite these advantages, the decentralization of Zambia's education system has faced several obstacles. The decentralization process, although well-intentioned, is often poorly implemented due to the lack of sufficient institutional support, capacity-building programs, and financial resources at the local level. A major concern is the limited administrative capacity of local government to effectively manage education. Mumba (2018) points out that local authorities often lack the skills and training to properly implement national education policies, leading to inconsistencies in policy implementation across regions [2]. Without adequate technical expertise and training, local authorities struggle to

manage school infrastructure, develop curricula that meet national standards, or ensure effective recruitment and retention of teachers. Furthermore, Bwalya (2016) finds that decentralization has inadvertently widened inequalities in access and quality of education, particularly between urban and rural areas. While local governments in urban areas have the financial resources and administrative capacity to implement educational reforms, those in rural areas often lack the infrastructure and funding to make meaningful changes. This unequal distribution of resources exacerbates regional disparities in education, undermining the central objective of decentralization, which is to achieve equal access for all children [6].

Furthermore, the financial autonomy granted to local governments has proven to be insufficient in many cases. As Zgambo (2015) argues, while decentralization aims to give local governments more control over education budgets, the current financial resources allocated to these governments remain limited, hindering their ability to implement comprehensive reforms [4]. Without adequate funding, local authorities are unable to fill infrastructural gaps, recruit qualified teachers or purchase essential teaching materials, reducing the effectiveness of education policies. The political dimension of decentralization poses another challenge. In Zambia, local governments are often subject to political influence, with elected officials prioritizing short-term political gains over long-term educational improvements. This can lead to a lack of continuity in education policies, as political transitions often lead to changes in education priorities. In some cases, political interference at the local level can compromise the implementation of education policies, as local authorities feel compelled to make decisions that correspond to political interests rather than best educational practices.

Finally, while decentralization aims to empower local communities, it can sometimes lead to the marginalization of certain groups. Local elites or powerful community members may benefit disproportionately from decentralized decision-making, leading to inequities in resource distribution or access to educational opportunities. Mumba (2018) notes that in some areas, local government structures have been co-opted by vested interests, making it difficult for marginalized communities, particularly in rural areas, to have their needs met. [2]

### **Conclusion: Balancing the Benefits and Risks of Decentralization**

The decentralization of Zambia's education system presents both opportunities and challenges. The delegation of authority to local governments has the potential to improve education governance by making policies more responsive to local needs and encouraging greater community participation. However, the success of decentralization depends on the ability of local governments to effectively manage education resources, as well as on the financial and technical support they receive from central government. To fully realize the potential of decentralization, it is essential that Zambia addresses gaps in local government capacity, ensures equitable distribution of resources, and strengthens the institutional frameworks that support decentralization efforts. Without these measures, decentralization risks exacerbating existing educational inequalities, rather than reducing them.

### **5. The Role of Stakeholders in Education**

In Zambia, the education system is shaped by the active participation of various stakeholders, each with distinct roles and

responsibilities in the formulation, implementation and evaluation of education policies. The main stakeholders include government, educational institutions, teachers, students, parents, communities, civil society organizations and international development partners. These stakeholders contribute to policy processes in different ways, whether through direct participation in decision-making, through consultation, or through indirect influence through advocacy and feedback mechanisms. Understanding the role of these stakeholders is essential for analyzing the effectiveness with which education policies are developed and implemented. Definition and conceptualization of stakeholders in education

Stakeholders in education are individuals, groups, or organizations that have a direct interest in the education system and its outcomes. According to Freeman (1984), stakeholders are entities that can influence or be influenced by the activities of an organization, and this concept is equally important in the context of education [1]. In the case of the Zambian education system, stakeholders are not limited to those directly involved in the management or delivery of education, such as teachers and administrators, but also include parents, students, community leaders, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and international agencies that provide funding and policy guidance.

Scholars such as Davis and Thompson (2016) argue that effective stakeholder engagement is essential to ensure that education policies are not only designed but also well implemented [2]. This commitment allows policies to respond to the needs and priorities of the different groups on which education has an impact. However, stakeholder involvement is often uneven, with some groups having more influence than others in policy decisions.

### **The role of government in education policy**

The government, as the central authority, exerts the most important influence on the formulation and implementation of education policies. In Zambia, the Ministry of Education is responsible for the overall administration of the education system, including policy formulation, curriculum development, teacher training and resource allocation. According to Mumba (2018), the role of government is crucial in creating legal frameworks, such as the Education Act, and ensuring that policies are aligned with national development goals, including those set by international organizations such as the UN [3].

The government also plays a key role in regulating education standards, ensuring that schools adhere to national guidelines. Zgambo (2015) points out that while government is primarily responsible for creating policies, the success of these policies often depends on the extent to which local authorities, schools and communities are able to take ownership of their implementation. However, as Mumba (2018) notes, government policies are often top-down, with limited consultation with local communities, which can result in policies that do not fully reflect educational needs or local realities.

### **Educational institutions and administrators**

Educational institutions, including primary, secondary and higher education institutions, are at the heart of policy implementation. School administrators, such as principals and teachers, are responsible for ensuring that policies are translated into practice in their schools. According to Bwalya (2016), educational institutions are the main places where educational policies are implemented. They must adapt national guidelines to local contexts, manage

resources, curricula and teachers to ensure that policies are implemented effectively.

However, the role of administrators goes beyond simply implementing government directives. They are often involved in the feedback loop, which provides valuable insights into the practical challenges of policy implementation. Their involvement is essential to identify gaps, whether in terms of teacher preparation, resource allocation or infrastructure, that may hinder the successful implementation of educational reforms.

#### **Teachers and their involvement in policy formulation**

Teachers constitute another key group of stakeholders in the Zambian education system. As frontline practitioners, teachers are directly responsible for the delivery of education and therefore have a critical role to play in the successful implementation of policies. According to Sinyangwe (2019), teachers need to be adequately trained, supported and consulted during the policy-making process to ensure that reforms align with classroom realities [5]. However, teachers' participation in policy discussions often remains limited and their voices are often not sufficiently heard in decision-making forums.

While teachers are at the centre of the educational process, they face significant challenges related to the implementation of educational policies, such as overcrowded classrooms, limited resources and insufficient professional development opportunities. As stakeholders, teachers should be involved in the policy process to provide feedback on the feasibility of proposed reforms and the effectiveness of existing policies. Teachers' unions, such as the Zambia National Union of Teachers (ZNUT), can play a vital role in protecting teachers' rights and ensuring that policies reflect the practical realities of the teaching profession.

#### **Parents and community**

Parents and local communities are key actors in Zambia's education system, as they influence their children's academic achievement and contribute to the wider social and cultural context in which education policies are implemented. According to Zgambo (2015), parental involvement in education is essential to improve student achievement. Parents not only support the home education of their children, but also advocate for better schools and policies that respond to local needs. However, the level of engagement varies significantly between urban and rural areas. In rural areas, where access to education is often limited, communities find it more difficult to support educational initiatives.

Another important area is community participation in school governance. In Zambia, school management committees (SMCs) and parent-teacher associations (PTAs) are often responsible for ensuring that schools are well-run and policies are implemented effectively. These committees can provide valuable information to local education authorities, ensuring that policies meet the needs of the community.

While parental and community involvement is generally recognized as beneficial for improving educational outcomes, structured channels for meaningful participation are often lacking. According to Mumba (2018), in many cases, policies are formulated at the national level and implemented without sufficient consultation with local communities, especially in rural areas. This lack of engagement can lead to policies that are disconnected from

the realities facing local communities, resulting in suboptimal outcomes.

#### **Civil Society Organizations and International Partners**

Civil society organizations (CSOs) and international partners, including NGOs and development agencies, also play an influential role in Zambia's education system. These organizations provide financial support, technical expertise, and advocacy for educational reforms. For example, international organizations such as UNICEF and the World Bank contribute to Zambia's education policies by supporting initiatives to improve access to education, particularly for marginalized groups, and by providing advice on best practices in educational governance.

However, while these external actors bring valuable resources and expertise, their involvement is sometimes criticized for imposing foreign agendas that are not always aligned with local priorities. According to Bwalya (2016), the influence of international donors and NGOs can sometimes lead to a discrepancy between the priorities of the national government and the agenda of external actors [6]. To mitigate this problem, the Zambian government must ensure that external assistance is aligned with national policies to avoid fragmentation and ensure the sustainability of reforms in the long term.

#### **Conclusion: A comprehensive approach to stakeholder engagement**

Successful implementation of education policies in Zambia requires a comprehensive and inclusive approach to stakeholder engagement. While government, educational institutions and communities play a central role, the involvement of parents, teachers, civil society organisations and international partners is equally important. Policy makers need to recognise the value of stakeholder input at every stage of the policy process, from formulation to implementation and evaluation. By fostering an environment in which all stakeholders are actively involved, Zambia's education system can better meet the diverse needs of its students and work towards achieving equity and quality education for all.

#### **6. External Influences on Education Policy**

External influences play a vital role in shaping Zambia's education policies, with international organizations, foreign donors, and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) providing financial and technical support for education reforms. These external actors bring valuable resources, expertise, and knowledge, but their involvement can also present challenges related to aligning policies with local needs, the sustainability of reforms, and the potential for dependence on foreign aid. Understanding the dynamics of external influences is essential to assessing the impact of these actors on Zambia's education system and the long-term implications of foreign involvement in policy formulation and implementation.

#### **Determining External Influences on Educational Policy**

External influences on educational policy refer to the involvement of actors outside a country's borders that directly or indirectly influence the formulation, implementation, and evaluation of educational policies. According to Bellon (2018), these influences often come from multilateral institutions such as the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), bilateral development agencies, international NGOs,

and financial institutions such as the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) [1]. External influences can include funding, technical assistance, policy advice, and the promotion of global educational standards.

These external actors are motivated by a variety of factors, including humanitarian goals, the international development agenda, and the desire to promote universal standards in education. However, as Mweemba (2017) argues, the involvement of these actors often results in the adoption of global educational policies that are not always appropriate for the unique Zambian context [7]. While international frameworks such as Education for All (EFA) and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) play a role in shaping the national education agenda, they can sometimes overshadow local priorities and lead to imposed policies that can be counterproductive - economically. and country realities. External funding and its impact on education policy

One of the most important external influences on Zambia's education system is financial support from international donors. These funds are essential to fill resource gaps, particularly in areas such as infrastructure development, teacher training and the provision of educational materials. However, the reliance on foreign funding for education has raised concerns about the long-term sustainability of reforms. According to Zgambo (2015), external funding often comes with strings attached, which can create political dependency and limit the government's ability to make independent decisions that are consistent with the country's educational priorities [4].

The issue of external funding is complicated by the fact that donor support is often unpredictable and subject to global economic conditions. As Mweemba (2017) has noted, fluctuations in international aid can hinder the implementation of education programmes, particularly in rural and underserved areas where resources are most needed [7]. This can lead to inconsistencies in policy implementation, especially when donor funding is withdrawn or reduced, leading to disruptions in education services and a lack of continuity in long-term reforms.

Furthermore, the focus of international donors on specific areas, such as literacy or gender equality, can sometimes lead to an imbalance in policy priorities. As Sinyangwe (2019) has noted, donors often prioritize short-term measurable goals that align with global initiatives, rather than addressing Zambia's broader systemic challenges, such as teacher shortages, infrastructure deficiencies and curriculum development [5]. This can result in a fragmented education system, where some policy areas receive more attention than others, neglecting the overall improvement of the quality of education.

### **The role of international organizations in policy formulation**

International organizations such as UNESCO, UNICEF and the World Bank play a vital role in influencing Zambia's education policy, providing financial support and technical expertise. These organizations work in partnership with the Zambian government to support the implementation of education reforms, particularly in areas such as access to education, improving quality and reducing gender inequalities. According to Bwalya (2016), international organizations often set global education standards that shape national policy frameworks, pushing countries such as Zambia to adopt policies that are consistent with international standards [6].

While collaboration with international organizations is beneficial in terms of knowledge exchange and access to best practices, it also presents challenges. As noted by Zgambo (2015), the presence of multiple international actors with competing agendas can lead to policy fragmentation, where different donors promote different aspects of education, such as vocational training, curriculum modernization, or infrastructure development, without coordinating their efforts to achieve a coherent education strategy [4]. This lack of coordination can lead to policy incoherence, where reforms are implemented piecemeal rather than as part of a comprehensive and unified approach to improving education.

### **Challenges of Donor-led Programs**

One of the most important criticisms of external influences on education policy in Zambia is the potential for donor-led programs to overshadow local needs and priorities. As Mweemba (2017) argues, while international donors often provide much-needed financial resources, their influence can lead to the adoption of policies that reflect global education priorities rather than Zambia's specific educational challenges and socio-cultural context [7]. For example, donors may prioritize international education goals, such as the EFA goals or the Sustainable Development Goals, at the expense of issues more relevant to the local Zambian education context, such as addressing the teacher shortage or improving access to education in rural areas.

This donor-led approach may result in policies that are not adequately adapted to Zambian realities, leading to inefficiencies in implementation. According to Bwalya (2016), the imposition of external agendas without adequate consultation with local stakeholders often results in policies that lack local ownership and are less likely to be implemented successfully [6]. Furthermore, a focus on meeting donor expectations rather than addressing the underlying challenges of Zambia's education system may compromise the long-term sustainability of education reforms.

### **Bottom line: balancing foreign aid with local priorities**

While foreign aid plays a critical role in addressing resource gaps and promoting education reform in Zambia, it is essential to ensure that this aid aligns with the country's long-term education priorities. The government must find a balance between accepting foreign aid and maintaining control over its education program to ensure that policies reflect local needs and priorities. In addition, Zambia must work to build capacity at the local level to reduce its reliance on external funding, thereby ensuring that education reforms are sustainable and not overly dependent on foreign aid.

A more integrated approach, in which external actors collaborate with local actors in a way that respects the Zambian educational context, is essential to achieving sustainable and equitable educational outcomes. By promoting local ownership of educational policies and reforms, Zambia can better address the challenges posed by external influences and create a globally and locally competitive education system.

### **Conclusion**

The governance of the Zambian education system is shaped by a multitude of factors that influence its effectiveness and impact. A detailed literature review shows that Zambia's educational landscape is influenced by complex interrelationships between policy formulation, legal frameworks, decentralization, stakeholder involvement and external influences. These factors together form a

delicate balance that determines the success or failure of educational reforms in the country.

In terms of policy formulation, Zambia's approach is often reactive rather than proactive, driven by immediate policy agendas rather than a comprehensive long-term vision for the education sector. As Kanyongo (2007) points out, policies are often designed in response to external pressures, such as international development goals, without considering the specific needs of Zambia's diverse population [1]. This lack of alignment between policy objectives and local contexts has hindered the effectiveness of reforms. Furthermore, the legal framework, in particular the Education Law, has not evolved at a pace that allows it to respond to the complexity of modern education challenges, such as the professionalization of teaching and the integration of technology in education [4]. The challenges of the legal framework are compounded by weak enforcement mechanisms and limited capacities at the local level, which prevent the law from serving as an effective tool for managing the education system.

The decentralization of education governance, aimed at promoting local autonomy and responsiveness to regional educational needs, has been only partially successful. While decentralization promises to make educational policies more relevant in context, it has also led to inequity in resource distribution and inconsistent policy implementation, particularly between urban and rural areas. As Mumba (2018) notes, local authorities often lack the financial resources and administrative capacity to effectively implement national education policies [2]. This challenge of decentralization has contributed to regional inequalities, compromising the goal of providing equal educational opportunities for all Zambian children, regardless of their geographical location. The role of stakeholders, especially local communities, has also been critical but underutilized in the governance of education in Zambia. While government agencies and educational institutions are the main drivers of policy, the involvement of parents, teachers and local communities remains limited. As Zgambo (2015) points out, for policies to be truly effective, they must be shaped by local realities, with consultation and active participation of grassroots stakeholders [4]. However, current practices often reflect top-down approaches that fail to integrate the views and needs of those directly affected by education policies. This disconnect leads to policies that are either irrelevant or difficult to implement effectively at the local level.

External influences, including international organizations, donors, and NGOs, also play an important role in shaping Zambia's education policies. While external funding and technical assistance have been important in expanding access to education and improving infrastructure, they have also raised concerns about political dependency and the alignment of reforms with Zambia's long-term education priorities. As Mweemba (2017) points out, international aid often comes with strings attached, favoring donor-led programs that are not always aligned with the country's socio-economic context or local educational challenges [7]. This external influence can create fragmentation in the policy framework, where educational reforms are driven by short-term goals and external pressures rather than a coherent and relevant domestic strategy.

Despite these challenges, Zambia has made significant progress in expanding access to education, with significant improvements in enrolment rates and the establishment of free primary education. However, as Dube (2013) argues, the key challenge is to ensure

that these gains are not eroded by systemic problems such as inadequate funding, a lack of qualified teachers and poor infrastructure [5]. To build on the progress made, it is essential that Zambia adopts a more integrated and coherent approach to education governance that prioritizes equity, quality and sustainability.

To address the ongoing challenges, a more comprehensive strategy is needed. This should include increased local participation in decision-making processes, a more responsive and adaptable legal framework, and a shift towards more sustainable funding mechanisms that reduce dependence on external donors. In addition, targeted reforms that focus on improving teacher training, infrastructure, and curriculum development are needed to raise the standard of education across the country. Finally, stronger monitoring and evaluation systems are essential to ensure that education policies are implemented effectively and achieve the desired outcomes. In conclusion, education governance in Zambia requires a multidimensional approach that balances policy development with local engagement, legal reform, and external support. Although challenges remain, particularly with regard to access and equitable quality, there is potential for transformative change if these areas are comprehensively addressed. Through targeted reforms, closer collaboration among stakeholders, and a focus on implementing sustainable policies, Zambia can move closer to achieving its education goals, ensuring that all children, regardless of their origin or geographic location, receive a quality education that prepares them for the challenges of the 21st century.

## **Methodology**

This research adopted a qualitative approach to explore the complexities of education governance in Zambia, focusing on challenges, legal frameworks, decentralization, stakeholder involvement, and the influence of external actors. The qualitative research design was chosen due to the need for in-depth understanding and interpretation of the Zambian education system, which is shaped by numerous factors such as policy formulation, local governance, and external influences. The methodology involved a combination of literature review, document analysis, and expert interviews to collect and analyze relevant data.

### **1. Literature Review**

A comprehensive literature review was conducted as the primary data collection method. This review covers a wide range of academic articles, government reports, policy papers and publications from international organizations relevant to the Zambian education system. The literature review focuses on several main themes:

The process of formulating education policy and its alignment with global frameworks.

The effectiveness of legal frameworks in regulating and managing education, particularly the Education Act.

The impact of decentralization on education governance and local implementation capacities.

Stakeholder participation and the role of external actors in the development of education policies. This approach enabled a deep understanding of existing research on education governance in Zambia and provided a theoretical framework to analyze the challenges and opportunities in the system.

## **2. Document Analysis**

Document analysis was used to examine key policy documents and legal frameworks that govern the Zambian education system. These documents include:

The Zambia Education Act and its amendments.

National education policy frameworks, such as Education for All (EFA) reports and strategies. Reports from international organizations such as UNESCO, the World Bank, and UNICEF on Zambia's progress in education.

Government publications detailing Zambia's education reforms, decentralization efforts, and stakeholder consultations.

Analysis of these documents allowed for an assessment of how education policies have been formulated, the legal requirements for managing the education system, and the challenges associated with implementation. It also highlighted gaps between policy goals and actual outcomes, highlighting the limitations of existing frameworks.

## **3. Interviews with key stakeholders**

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with key stakeholders involved in the Zambian education system, including:

Responsible for the educational policy of the Ministry of Education.

Representatives of local authorities responsible for education management.

Teachers, school administrators, and education officials.

Representatives of international organizations and NGOs involved in the Zambian education sector.

Experts in education governance, including academic researchers and consultants. These interviews provided insight into the challenges and practical experiences of those directly involved in policy formulation and implementation. By gathering information from a diverse group of stakeholders, the study aimed to identify barriers to effective policy implementation and the role of decentralization in improving or hindering access and quality of education.

## **4. Data Analysis**

Data collected from desk review, document analysis and interviews were analyzed using thematic analysis. This method involved identifying and analyzing patterns or themes in the data to understand the underlying issues and challenges in education governance in Zambia. Thematic analysis allowed the researcher to:

Examine how policies have been shaped by political agendas and external influences.

To study the effectiveness of legal frameworks and decentralization in improving educational outcomes.

Assess the role of stakeholder participation in policy formulation and implementation.

To study the impact of external funding and donor-led agendas on educational reforms.

The data were coded into themes such as "policy formulation", "legal frameworks", "decentralization", "stakeholder involvement"

and "external influences". These themes were then analyzed to draw conclusions about the strengths and weaknesses of the education governance system in Zambia.

## **5. Boundaries**

The study acknowledged several limitations, including:

The use of secondary data, which may be subject to prejudice or incomplete information. Difficulty accessing complete and up-to-date reports from local government sources or rural education sectors.

The risk of bias in the interview, especially from interested parties with interests in educational policy.

Despite these limitations, the methodology proved powerful in providing a comprehensive understanding of the factors that influenced education governance in Zambia and the obstacles to achieving equitable and quality education for all.

## **Conclusion**

The qualitative methodology used in this research allowed for an in-depth exploration of the challenges and opportunities of education governance in Zambia. Combining literature review, document analysis and stakeholder interviews, the study provided valuable insights into the effectiveness of education policies, legal frameworks and the decentralization process. The findings have contributed to the ongoing debate on how to improve education governance in Zambia, highlighting the need for more coherent, locally relevant and sustainable education reforms.

## **Theoretical Framework**

This research draws on systems theory as its main theoretical framework. Systems theory, as proposed by Ludwig von Bertalanffy (1968), views an organization or unit as a complex set of interrelated components that work together to achieve a common goal [1]. In the context of educational governance, the theory emphasizes that educational systems are composed of interdependent elements, including policy formulation, legal frameworks, decentralization, stakeholder engagement, and external influences. These components must work cohesively to produce effective outcomes. The theory provides a holistic perspective to analyze the dynamics, challenges, and opportunities in the educational governance system in Zambia. The main theoretical concepts

### **1. Interdependence of components**

Systems theory emphasizes that changes in one part of the system affect other parts. For example, gaps in policy formulation or inadequate legal frameworks can have a significant impact on implementation and stakeholder engagement. This interdependence highlights the need for coherence and harmonization between the various components of the Zambian education system.

### **2. Inputs, processes and outputs**

The theory divides systems into inputs (resources, policies and external influences), processes (policy implementation, legal governance and decentralization) and outputs (quality and equity of education). This framework allows research to examine how each stage contributes to or hinders desired outcomes in the Zambian education system.

### **3. Feedback mechanisms**

Effective systems include feedback mechanisms for adaptation and improvement. The research explores how stakeholder engagement and external evaluations influence the iterative process of refining education policies and governance in Zambia. Main theory used: Systems theory

The application of systems theory in this study brought several advantages:

**Holistic understanding:** It allowed the researcher to examine education governance in Zambia as an interconnected system rather than isolated issues.

**Managing complexity:** It helped to analyze how external influences, legal frameworks, and stakeholder dynamics interact and affect policy outcomes.

**Dynamic adaptability:** Systems theory emphasized the importance of feedback mechanisms to enable Zambia's education governance system to adapt to challenges such as funding gaps and regional disparities.

#### **Complementary Theories**

In addition to systems theory, the study integrated complementary theoretical perspectives:

**Decentralization theory** (Oates, 1972) was used to examine the impact of local government and autonomy on educational outcomes. This theory posits that decentralization can improve efficiency and accountability by bringing decision-making closer to the local level [2]. **Stakeholder theory** (Freeman, 1984) has been applied to understand the roles and interests of various actors in education governance, including government, communities and international organizations. This theory has provided insight into the importance of participatory governance and the balance of power among stakeholders [3].

#### **Relevance to research objectives**

Based on research in systems theory and integrating complementary perspectives, the study addressed the multifaceted nature of education governance in Zambia. This theoretical framework has helped to identify gaps, inefficiencies and opportunities in the system, providing a comprehensive basis for recommendations to improve policy coherence, resource allocation and stakeholder engagement.

#### **Discussion**

The findings of this research highlight the complex interplay between policy formulation, legal frameworks, decentralization, stakeholder involvement and external influences in the educational governance system in Zambia. Although significant progress has been made in expanding access to education, significant challenges remain, particularly in achieving equitable and high-quality educational outcomes. This discussion examines these factors, supported by insights from the theoretical framework and academic literature.

#### **1. Policy formulation: a reactive approach**

The study reveals that the policy formulation process in Zambia is often reactive, driven by immediate political agendas and external pressures rather than long-term strategic planning. This is consistent with Kanyongo's (2007) observation that education policies in Zambia are heavily influenced by global frameworks

such as the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) [1]. While these global commitments have stimulated positive reforms, their relevance to local needs remains insufficient. The discrepancy between policy design and contextual realities highlights the need for a more inclusive and participatory approach to policy formulation that includes the voice of local stakeholders.

#### **2. Legal Framework: Weak Implementation and Outdated Policies**

The research highlights the limited effectiveness of Zambia's legal frameworks, such as the Education Act, in regulating and managing the education system. Zgambo (2015) points out that these frameworks often lack rigorous enforcement mechanisms, which lead to inconsistencies in their implementation [4]. On the other hand, the outdated legal provisions fail to face new problems such as the integration of technology and the professionalization of teaching. Strengthening legal frameworks through regular updates and enhanced implementation capacities is essential to improve governance and accountability in the education sector.

#### **3. Decentralization and local governance: unequal results**

Decentralization aims to improve local responsibility and autonomy in education governance. However, the findings show that the process has led to an unequal distribution of resources and disparities in the quality of education, particularly in rural areas. This supports Mumba's (2018) argument that local governments often lack the financial and administrative capacity to effectively implement national policies [2]. While decentralization promises to improve governance, its success depends on filling capacity gaps through targeted training and resource allocation to local authorities.

#### **4. Stakeholder engagement: limited participation**

Stakeholder engagement is essential to ensure that education policies reflect local needs and priorities. However, the study reveals that stakeholder participation in Zambia remains limited, particularly in rural areas where community participation is often neglected. This finding echoes Freeman's (1984) stakeholder theory, which emphasizes the importance of participatory governance to achieve sustainable outcomes [3]. Expanding opportunities for community participation and promoting partnerships with civil society organizations can improve the relevance and effectiveness of educational policies.

#### **5. External influences: dependence and inconsistency**

External actors, including international organizations and donors, play a critical role in shaping Zambia's education policies. While their financial and technical support fills critical resource gaps, the study highlights concerns that donor-led programs may not be aligned with Zambia's long-term priorities. Mweemba (2017) warns that reliance on external funding can lead to political instability and difficulty in sustaining educational reforms [7]. Strengthening financial autonomy and encouraging collaborative partners that respect local autonomy are essential to reduce dependency and ensure the sustainability of educational policies.

#### **6. Address implementation challenges**

The study identifies several key implementation challenges, including inadequate funding, teacher shortages and resource disparities. These issues are interrelated and exacerbate existing inequalities in the education system. For example, the lack of qualified teachers contributes to overcrowded classes and low

academic performance, especially in underserved areas. Addressing these challenges requires a multifaceted approach, including increasing budget allocations for education, improving teacher training programs, and targeting interventions to support marginalized communities.

## **7. Theoretical Implications**

The application of systems theory to this research highlights the interdependence of the components of the education governance in Zambia. The findings highlight the importance of a coherent and integrated approach to policy formulation, legal governance, decentralization and stakeholder engagement. Feedback mechanisms, as suggested by systems theory, are essential to identify gaps and adapt policies to meet changing needs. Complementary insights from decentralization theory and stakeholder theory also emphasize the need for participatory and inclusive local governance practices.

## **Discussion**

The discussion reveals that while education governance in Zambia has made progress in expanding access to education, significant challenges remain in achieving quality and equity. Addressing these issues requires a comprehensive and systematic approach that strengthens the legal framework, improves local capacities, promotes stakeholder engagement, and reduces dependence on external influences. By adopting such an approach, Zambia can build a more resilient and inclusive education system that meets the needs of all its citizens.

## **Research Findings**

The findings of this research provide critical insights into the governance of education in Zambia, with a focus on policy formulation, legal frameworks, decentralization, stakeholder engagement, and external influences. These findings highlight both progress and ongoing challenges in the education system.

### **1. Policy formulation**

The research found that policy formulation in Zambia remains reactive, often driven by immediate political agendas and global commitments such as the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and Education for All (EFA). While these policies have improved access to education, they are often ill-suited to Zambia's local needs. Stakeholders interviewed indicated that the lack of consultation with local communities and education professionals has resulted in policies that do not reflect the realities on the ground.

### **2. Legal Framework**

A review of Zambia's Education Act and related legal documents revealed that the country has a strong legal framework in theory but little implementation in practice. For example, regulations aimed at professionalizing teaching and ensuring quality assurance are inconsistently implemented due to resource constraints and a lack of capacity among law enforcement agencies. Stakeholders noted that outdated provisions in the legal framework do not respond to new needs, such as the integration of technology into education.

### **3. Decentralization and local governance**

The study found that decentralization has produced mixed results. On the one hand, it has allowed local authorities to have more

autonomy to respond to the specific educational needs of communities. However, the unequal distribution of resources between urban and rural areas has led to disparities in the quality of education. Rural regions, in particular, suffer from a lack of qualified personnel and financial resources to effectively implement educational policies.

### **4. Stakeholder engagement**

Stakeholder engagement remains limited, particularly in rural areas. Parents and community members reported feeling excluded from policy decisions that directly affect their children's education. Although stakeholder participation is recognized as essential for successful policy implementation, the study found that decision-making processes remain largely centralized, with minimal consultation at the local level.

### **5. External Influences**

External actors, including international organizations, donors, and NGOs, have played an important role in shaping Zambia's education policies. While external funding has helped fill critical resource gaps, donor-led programs often prioritize global goals over local needs. Interviews with policymakers revealed that reliance on external funding undermines the sustainability of education reforms, with some initiatives being abandoned due to the withdrawal of donor support.

### **6. Implementation Challenges**

The research identified several implementation challenges:

**Insufficient funding:** Insufficient budget allocations have resulted in poor infrastructure, a lack of teaching materials, and limited access to quality education, particularly in rural areas. **Teacher Shortage:** The country faces a significant shortage of qualified teachers, leading to overcrowded classrooms and declining learning outcomes.

**Regional Disparities:** Urban schools tend to be better resourced and perform better than rural schools, highlighting systemic inequality in resource distribution.

**Monitoring and Evaluation:** Weak monitoring and evaluation systems for education policies hinder the identification and resolution of implementation gaps.

### **7. The Role of Systems Theory**

The application of systems theory to the analysis of education governance in Zambia has revealed that the interrelated components of the system (policy, legal frameworks, decentralization, and stakeholder engagement) must function coherently to achieve desired outcomes. The findings highlighted the importance of feedback mechanisms to ensure continuous improvement and adaptation of policies and practices.

## **Summary of findings**

The research highlights the need for a more coherent and comprehensive approach to education governance in Zambia. Strengthening legal frameworks, improving stakeholder engagement, addressing resource inequalities, and reducing reliance on external funding are essential to achieving sustainable and equitable educational outcomes. While progress has been made, addressing these challenges requires a coordinated effort by government, local communities, and international partners.

## **Research Gaps**

Despite significant progress in understanding education governance in Zambia, some gaps remain and require further exploration. These gaps highlight areas where more research and policy are needed to ensure a stronger and more equitable education system.

### **1. Limited data on regional disparities**

Although this research has identified significant disparities between urban and rural areas in terms of resource allocation and educational outcomes, empirical data are insufficient to fully understand the magnitude and root causes of these disparities. Detailed studies of regional differences, particularly in underserved regions, are needed to develop targeted interventions.

### **2. Inadequate exploration of policy effectiveness**

The effectiveness of existing education policies, such as free primary education and teacher professionalization programs, remains poorly studied. There are no longitudinal studies that assess the impact of these policies on access, quality, and equity of education over time.

### **3. Poor analysis of stakeholder dynamics**

The research highlights the limited involvement of stakeholders in policy processes, but does not deeply analyze the power dynamics and relationships between stakeholders, such as government, parents, teachers, NGOs, and donors. Understanding these dynamics is essential to promote more inclusive and participatory governance.

### **4. Lack of research on the implementation of the legal framework**

Although research has identified weaknesses in the implementation of Zambia's legal framework, there is little evidence on specific barriers to implementation. Studies that focus on institutional capacity, corruption, and administrative inefficiency can provide actionable information for improving governance.

### **5. The impact of external influences on sustainability**

The role of external actors in education governance in Zambia is well documented, but there is a lack of analysis of how donor-led programmes affect the long-term sustainability of education reforms. More research is needed to examine how Zambia can balance external support with local ownership of education policies.

### **6. Integrating technology into education**

Research has highlighted the lack of legal and policy frameworks that address the integration of technology into education. However, the potential of digital tools to bridge access and quality gaps has not been sufficiently explored. Investigating the feasibility and impact of technology solutions in rural and urban schools in Zambia is a critical area for future research.

### **7. Monitoring and Evaluation Mechanisms**

The lack of effective systems for monitoring and evaluating education policies represents a major gap. Research is needed to design and implement robust mechanisms to monitor policy implementation, measure outcomes, and provide feedback for continuous improvement.

## **8. Teacher well-being and retention**

Although the study identified the shortage of teachers and high turnover as key challenges, there is a lack of in-depth research on the socio-economic factors that influence the well-being of teachers, the satisfaction of the work and the retention of teachers, especially in rural areas.

## **9. The impact of decentralization on marginal communities**

Although decentralization has been implemented to improve local governance, little is known about its specific impacts on marginalized groups, such as children with disabilities and women in rural areas. More targeted research is needed to assess how decentralization affects the inclusion and equity of educational policies.

Addressing these research gaps is essential to building a more equitable and effective system of educational governance in Zambia. Future studies should prioritize data-driven analyses, comprehensive approaches to stakeholder engagement, and innovative solutions to ongoing challenges. By addressing these gaps, policymakers and researchers can better design and implement strategies that meet the diverse needs of the Zambian education system.

## **Conclusion**

This study provides an in-depth exploration of education governance in Zambia, focusing on the interrelated areas of policy formulation, legal frameworks, decentralization, stakeholder participation and external influences. Using systems theory as a guiding framework, the study examines how these elements interact to shape education outcomes and identifies key challenges that undermine the provision of equitable and quality education. The findings highlight the need for a sustainable, comprehensive and sustainable approach to address systemic weaknesses while capitalizing on opportunities for improvement.

The study finds that policy formulation in Zambia is often reactive, influenced by political agendas and international commitments such as the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). While these policies have helped to expand access to education, they are often not aligned with local needs, leading to implementation gaps and regional disparities. Legal frameworks, including the Law on Education, provide a structural basis for governance, but are often hampered by weak implementation, outdated provisions and limited capacity at the local level. These problems hinder efforts to effectively regulate and improve the quality of education.

Decentralization, a key feature of Zambia's governance model, has enabled local authorities to respond to the specific needs of communities. However, inequalities in the distribution of resources and administrative capacities have exacerbated regional disparities, particularly in rural areas. Stakeholder participation remains limited, with parents, teachers and local communities having little involvement in policy formulation and decision-making processes. Greater involvement of these groups is essential to ensure that policies reflect the diverse needs and realities of the Zambian population.

External actors, including international donors and NGOs, have played a critical role in filling resource gaps and providing technical support for education reforms. While their contributions are important, donor-led programmes often prioritize global goals

over Zambia's long-term education priorities, raising concerns about the sustainability of reforms. In addition, the study highlights challenges such as insufficient funding, teacher shortages, weak monitoring and evaluation systems, and a heavy reliance on external funding as critical obstacles to effective implementation.

In conclusion, the study highlights the importance of adopting a comprehensive approach to education governance in Zambia. Strengthening legal frameworks, building local capacity, increasing stakeholder participation, and reducing reliance on external funding are essential steps to achieve sustainable and equitable educational outcomes. By addressing these systemic challenges, Zambia can build a resilient education system that responds to the diverse needs of its population and supports national development goals.

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