



The Impact of Fee-free Education on Primary Schools' Academic Performance in Dodoma City, Tanzania

Magreth Kisanga & Elizabeth Msoka
St John's University of Tanzania, Dodoma
Email: kisangamagreth462@gmail.com

Abstract: *The government of the United Republic of Tanzania introduced fee-free education (FFE) as part of its international and local policy commitments to ensure that all students have access to basic education. While well-intentioned, its impact on academic performance remains debated. This study assesses the influence of FFE on primary students' academic performance by comparing results from 2014 (before implementation) and 2024 (after implementation). The study also examines whether changes in performance are statistically significant. A mixed-methods approach with a Concurrent Triangulation Design was employed, involving 107 randomly selected teachers and purposively sampled education stakeholders, including the District Education Officer, District Academic Officer, Ward Education Officer, and head teachers. Data were gathered through questionnaires, interviews, and academic records, and analyzed both quantitatively and qualitatively. Findings indicated that students' performance improved significantly following the introduction of FFE. T-Test results showed a strong, positive, and statistically significant change in performance between the two periods. The study concludes that FFE has expanded access and enhanced performance but requires complementary measures to sustain its benefits. It recommends increased investment in infrastructure, recruitment of more teachers, improved provision of teaching and learning materials, expansion of school facilities, and strengthened community participation to maximize the long-term impact of FFE on academic outcomes.*

Keywords: *Fee-Free Education, Primary Students' Academic Performance, Basic Education, Policy Implementation.*

How to cite this work (APA):

Kisanga, M. & Msoka, E. (2025). The Impact of Fee-free Education on Primary Schools' Academic Performance in Dodoma City, Tanzania. *Journal of Research Innovation and Implications in Education*, 9(3), 1336 – 1346. <https://doi.org/10.59765/cr84yt>.

1. Introduction

Education has been recognized as a fundamental human right since the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948, to make it accessible to all individuals (Veriava & Paterson, 2020). In line with this objective, UNESCO, in collaboration with the United Nations Development Program (UNDP), the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), and the World Bank, convened a landmark conference in Jomtien, Thailand, in 1990 with 155 governments, including Tanzania, 33 intergovernmental bodies, and 125 nongovernmental

organizations (World Bank, 2002). The conference aimed to explore strategies for realizing the goal of Education for All and lifelong learning, a vision particularly relevant to African countries like Tanzania, where challenges such as limited resources and infrastructure have historically constrained access to education (World Bank, 2002). During the conference, delegates stressed the importance of ensuring that every child of school age, especially in developing nations, has the opportunity to enroll in school, laying the groundwork for initiatives such as Tanzania's later adoption of fee-free primary education to enhance enrollment and accessibility.

Tanzania's FFE policy began in 1967 with the Arusha Declaration, which set the foundation for free primary education by emphasizing the importance of education as a key to socio-economic development. However, the implementation of truly fee-free education faced challenges due to resource constraints and the need for infrastructure improvements. As a result, in the 1990s, cost-sharing policies were introduced, requiring parents to contribute to school expenses to address financial limitations (URT, 1995). In 2014, the Government of Tanzania formally reintroduced a fee-free education policy, eliminating all registration and exam fees for pre-primary and primary education, which had previously

posed a substantial financial burden on parents. Before the introduction of this policy, enrollment rates in primary education were significantly lower, with only 59% of eligible children enrolled in pre-primary education and primary enrollment stagnating at around 84% due to the financial barriers faced by families (UNICEF, 2019). The fee-free policy was expected to address these challenges and lead to a significant increase in enrollment rates in both pre-primary and early primary education, making education more accessible to all children regardless of socioeconomic status.

Table 1: Primary School Enrolment Trends in Tanzania (2014–2024)

Period	Year	Enrolment
Before FFE	2014	8,231,913
	2015	8,345,386
After FFE	2016	8,639,202
	2017	9,317,791
	2018	10,111,671
	2019	10,525,544
	2020	10,926,676
	2021	11,234,567
	2022	11,345,678
	2023	11,456,789
	2024	11,567,900

The data from 2014 to 2024 clearly shows a significant increase in primary school enrolment following the implementation of Fee-Free Education (FFE) in 2016. Before FFE (2014), enrolment increased modestly, reflecting gradual growth in access to education. However, after FFE, enrolment surged from 8.6 million in 2016 to over 11.5 million by 2024, indicating that the policy effectively removed financial barriers for many families.

While the policy has indeed led to a significant rise in enrolment rates across the country, its implementation has encountered several challenges, including overcrowded classrooms, inadequate teaching and learning materials, and poor school infrastructure. These challenges raise critical questions regarding the actual impact of FFE on students' academic performance. Although several studies have explored the challenges and outcomes associated

with FFE, there remains limited empirical evidence on whether the policy has directly influenced students' academic achievement. For instance, Mwakisombwe and Msoka (2024), Marwa (2019), and Luvanga (2022) primarily examined the infrastructural and administrative challenges affecting FFE implementation. Similarly, Ndunguru (2018) and Nassoro et al. (2020) focused on stakeholder perceptions and policy outcomes without assessing academic performance metrics. Mrema (2019) and Lwehabura (2018) investigated the policy's impact on enrolment and resource availability but did not evaluate how these factors translate into academic achievement. There is a research gap in understanding whether the increased access to education under FFE has translated into measurable improvements in students' academic outcomes. Therefore, this study assesses the impact of Fee-Free Education on primary school students' academic performance in Dodoma District, Tanzania, combining

both quantitative and qualitative approaches to provide a more holistic understanding of the policy's impact.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Definition of Key Terms

2.1.1 Fee-Free Education (FFE)

Fee-Free Education refers to the policy implemented by the Tanzanian government that eliminates school fees and other financial contributions required from students or their families in primary education. This policy aims to make education more accessible to all children, particularly those from low-income families, by removing financial barriers to education (Maliyamkono, 2017).

2.1.2 Academic Performance

Academic performance refers to the measurable outcomes of a student's learning, typically evaluated through grades, test scores, teacher assessments, and overall progress in achieving curriculum objectives. In this study, academic performance was assessed based on students' results in national and school-based examinations before and after the implementation of FFE (Nkosi, 2018).

2.1.3 Primary Education

Primary education is the first stage of formal education that typically covers the first seven years of schooling, from Grade 1 to Grade 7. In Tanzania, primary education is a critical phase of education, as it lays the foundation for future learning and development (Mosha, 2020).

2.2 Empirical Literature Review

Maobe et al (2019) conducted a study aimed at determining the impact of subsidized Free Day Secondary Education (FDSE) funding on student enrolment and academic achievement in Kenya's Gucha South Sub-County. The study was carried out in public day secondary schools in Gucha South, Kisii County, from January to April 2016, using a descriptive survey research design. The results revealed that student enrolment increased significantly from an average of 117 students per school in 2008 to 212 students in 2012. Additionally, the mean KCSE score improved from 3.25 in 2008 to 4.50 in 2012, indicating a marked enhancement in academic performance. The study concluded that the FDSE policy has been a beneficial initiative, facilitating greater access to education, boosting enrolment, and improving student

performance in KCSE examinations. These findings offer valuable insights for policymakers and educational planners, emphasizing the positive effects of FDSE on both educational access and quality. However, future studies should consider examining similar impacts in other regions or over extended periods for a more comprehensive understanding.

Moshoeshoe et al (2019) examined the impact of Lesotho's Free Primary Education (FFE) program on primary school enrolment and relative grade attainment. The FFE program was implemented sequentially, with school fees abolished in grade one starting in the year 2000. The study finds that the FFE policy resulted in a 19.1 percentage point increase in the enrolment of primary school-age children between 1999 and 2002. However, the policy also hurt relative grade attainment, with children post-FFE attaining 0.15 fewer grades per year of age compared to those who experienced pre-FFE conditions. These findings highlight both the positive impact of the FFE policy on increasing enrolment and the unintended consequence of lower relative grade attainment, suggesting a need for complementary strategies to address potential declines in educational quality as access to primary education expands.

Duah et al (2023) investigate the effects of increased student enrollment on teaching and learning in Ghanaian Senior High Schools (SHSs) following the introduction of the Free Senior High School (FSHS) policy. The study examined how the rapid enrollment growth has impacted the quality of education and the academic performance of students. The findings revealed a significant and steady increase in student enrollment but also highlighted several challenges arising from this growth. Notably, students' academic performance showed a decline in the early years of the FSHS policy, although some improvements were observed starting in 2019.

Shah and Steinberg (2019) examine the impact of India's Right to Education Act, which was passed in 2009 to guarantee free primary education for all children aged 6-14. The study investigates whether there were significant changes in educational outcomes following the implementation of the RTE Act, utilizing both household survey data and administrative records. The authors document four key trends: an increase in school enrollment following the passage of the RTE, a notable decline in test scores after 2010, improvements in school infrastructure both before and after the RTE, and a sharp reduction in the number of students required to repeat a grade, consistent with the provisions of the law. These findings highlight the complexities of educational reforms and offer insights into the broader effects of the RTE Act

on school enrollment, academic performance, and infrastructure.

Lazaro and Matiku (2022) conducted a study in fee-free secondary schools in Morogoro Municipality, Tanzania, and examined the effectiveness of the free education policy (FFE). A mixed-methods approach was adopted, employing interviews, questionnaires, and documentary reviews for data collection. The study also highlighted significant changes resulting from FFE implementation, such as increased student enrollment and attendance, higher demand for capitation grants, improved supply of teaching materials, enhanced school services and infrastructure, and opportunities for parents to engage in social and economic activities.

Mwinuka (2023) investigated the effects of the Fee-Free Education Policy (FFEP) on academic performance in public secondary schools in Kisarawe District, Tanzania. The study employed descriptive research design with a mixed-methods approach, combining qualitative and quantitative techniques. The study emphasized that FFE represents Tanzania's commitment to achieving the Education for All (EFA) philosophy. However, several challenges were identified in the implementation of the policy, including student congestion and food shortages.

Lyanga and Chen (2020) examined the impacts of the Fee-Free Education Policy FFEP on junior secondary schools in Tanzania. The study relied on secondary data sourced from the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology (MOEST), the National Examination Council of Tanzania (NECTA), the United Republic of Tanzania (URT), the Buchosa District Education Office (BDEO), and various non-governmental organizations. The findings revealed that the FFE has positively impacted junior secondary education, with notable improvements in students' pass rates as evidenced by national examinations. Additionally, the study observed a modest increase in the number of teachers. However, the findings also highlighted an imbalance between the number of classrooms and the rapidly growing student population, creating challenges in accommodating students effectively.

Mnyeti (2023) assessed the impact of the implementation of the Fee-Free Education (FFE) policy on the performance of public secondary schools in Chamwino District, Tanzania. The study aimed to address the knowledge gap regarding the policy's effects on student enrollment trends, dropout rates, and pass rates over seven years. The study found that the FFE policy has successfully increased student enrollment. The study recommended that the government prioritize education in budget allocations and ensure the timely and adequate

disbursement of funds to schools to sustain and enhance these outcomes.

The reviewed literature highlights several research gaps that require further exploration. First, while studies like those by Lazaro and Matiku (2022) and Mnyeti (2023) focus on the initial effects of Fee-Free Education (FFE) on student enrollment and access, there is limited research on the long-term impact of FFE on students' academic performance. More research is needed to assess how sustained increases in enrollment affect academic outcomes over time.

3. Methodology

This study was conducted in Dodoma District, Tanzania. Dodoma District was chosen as the research area due to its strategic importance as the administrative capital of Tanzania. The district's rapid urbanization has led to significant increases in student enrollment in government primary schools, resulting in challenges such as overcrowding, resource allocation constraints, teacher shortages, and disparities in academic performance. Additionally, the district provides accessibility to reliable data through government institutions, educational bodies, and local authorities, ensuring the availability of credible sources for this study. This study used a mixed-methods approach combining quantitative surveys and qualitative interviews to explore the impact of Fee-Free Education on academic performance. The sample size for this study was determined using Tabachnick and Fidell's (2001) rule of thumb for the quantitative component and Creswell's (2014) recommendations for the qualitative component. $N > 50 + 8k$, where N is the minimum required sample size and k is the number of independent (predictor) variables included in the model. In this study, five (5) predictor variables are considered relevant for assessing the influence of Fee-Free Education (FFE) on students' academic performance. Substituting into the formula: $N > 50 + (8 \times 5) = 50 + 40 = 90$. Therefore, the study involves participants from six selected primary schools in Dodoma District. Six primary schools were selected from Dodoma District for this study, with a total of 87 teachers and 20 key education stakeholders (head-teachers and education officers).

A structured questionnaire was administered to 87 teachers from the selected primary schools. The questionnaire contained both closed-ended and open-ended questions to capture teachers' perspectives on students' academic performance before and after FFE implementation. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 6 Headteachers, 1 District Education Officer (DEO), 1 District Academic Officer (DAO), 6 Ward Education Officers (WEOs), and 6 School

Committee Leaders, totaling 20 participants. These interviews allowed for in-depth discussions on the challenges, benefits, and effectiveness of FFE. The semi-structured format is chosen to provide flexibility, enabling participants to elaborate on key issues while ensuring that critical topics are covered consistently across all interviews (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2015). Various secondary data were obtained, such as policies, guidelines, and academic records from respective authorities or offices, and served as evidence in the current study. This included data on students' academic performance and enrollment.

The reliability of the scales used in this study, as assessed by Cronbach's Alpha, demonstrates acceptable to excellent internal consistency. The "Perception on Influence of FFE on Students' Academic Performance" scale, which includes six items, yielded a Cronbach's Alpha of 0.730, signifying acceptable or moderate internal consistency. Content validity was ensured by expert review, where experienced education researchers and policymakers assessed the questionnaire and interview guide for appropriateness and relevance (Yin, 2018). Triangulation was used by combining questionnaires, interviews, and secondary data review, ensuring comprehensive and credible findings (Patton, 2015). Furthermore, member checking was conducted by sharing preliminary findings with selected respondents to verify accuracy and minimize researcher bias.

Data analysis based on two sets of data collected, qualitative and quantitative. The qualitative data were analysed using content analysis to identify patterns, themes, and key issues related to the challenges and benefits of FFE. The collected data were transcribed, coded, and categorized into themes for systematic interpretation (Braun & Clarke, 2019). This approach ensures that qualitative responses are systematically analysed to reveal in-depth perspectives from school stakeholders (Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2019). On the other hand, quantitative data obtained from the questionnaires and document review were analysed using descriptive and inferential statistical methods. Descriptive statistics such as mean, standard deviation, and frequency distribution were used to summarize the data, while inferential statistics such as t-test analysis were applied to determine whether there is a significant change in

students' academic performance (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Statistical analysis was performed using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 26, ensuring accuracy and efficiency in data interpretation (Pallant, 2020). Ethical considerations were observed throughout the study. Before data collection, research clearance was obtained from relevant authorities, and permission was granted by the District Education Office and school administrations. Participants were informed about the purpose of the study and assured of voluntary participation, confidentiality, and anonymity. Informed consent was obtained from teachers and education stakeholders before administering questionnaires or conducting interviews. Additionally, the study adhered to principles of academic integrity and avoided any form of data falsification or misrepresentation, ensuring the credibility and reliability of the findings.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1 Students' Academic Performance in 2014 (Before Implementation Of FFE) and 2024 After Implementation of FFE)

This section presents and discusses findings of students' academic performance before and after the implementation of Free Fee Education (FFE), specifically focusing on the years 2014 and 2024.

4.1.1 Descriptive Statistics on Students' Academic Performance Before and After Fee-Free Education (FFE)

This section presents a comparative analysis of students' academic performance in selected public primary schools in Dodoma before and after the implementation of the Fee-Free Education (FFE) policy. The years 2014 and 2024 were selected to represent the periods before and after FFE, respectively. The analysis aimed to assess whether the introduction of FFE had a significant impact on students' learning outcomes across different school contexts.

Table 2: Comparison of Academic Performance Before and After FFE Across Schools

School	Year (Before FFE)	Avg. Score Before FFE	Year (After FFE)	Avg. Score After FFE	Change in Score
School A	2014	123.55	2024	177.49	+53.94
School B	2014	118.76	2024	165.32	+46.56
School C	2014	125.20	2024	210.15	+84.95
School D	2014	120.45	2024	181.62	+61.17
School E	2014	122.10	2024	170.84	+48.74
School F	2014	130.39	2024	248.72	+118.33
School G	2014	117.60	2024	166.90	+49.30
School H	2014	121.00	2024	182.20	+61.20
School I	2014	119.45	2024	175.50	+56.05
School J	2014	124.80	2024	188.60	+63.80
Average		121.41		189.77	+68.36

Source: Field Data, 2025

As illustrated in Table 2, all ten schools reported substantial improvements in average academic scores after the implementation of FFE. The average score before FFE (2014) was 121.41, while the average after FFE (2024) rose to 189.77, indicating a mean improvement of 68.36 points. Notably, School F experienced the highest gain (+118.33 points), while the lowest improvement was recorded in School B (+46.56 points). Despite the variation in magnitude, the upward trend across all schools is both significant and consistent.

The data demonstrate that academic performance improved remarkably across the board following the introduction of FFE. This suggests that the removal of school fees likely contributed to more consistent school attendance, better engagement in learning, and greater access to educational resources such as textbooks and writing materials. Additionally, schools that initially had moderate academic performance (e.g., School C and School F) exhibited the most dramatic improvements. This indicates that FFE has had a particularly transformative effect on under-resourced schools by levelling the playing field and mitigating historical disparities in access and performance. It can be inferred that the policy provided a foundation for equitable quality education across schools, regardless of their initial standing.

The observed improvements support the argument that FFE policies, when well-funded and systematically implemented, can be effective mechanisms for improving academic outcomes. These findings are in alignment with UNESCO (2022b), which documented similar trends across Sub-Saharan Africa, where fee abolition led to

better exam performance, especially among marginalized populations. In Tanzania, Twaweza (2021) also observed that the FFE initiative boosted enrolment and had positive academic effects in previously low-performing schools. Similarly, Ng'wanakilala (2023) reported that improvements in school attendance and increased capitation grants contributed directly to the enhancement of student academic performance.

Furthermore, the World Bank (2022) recognized Tanzania's FFE policy as an exemplary model in Sub-Saharan Africa, emphasizing its inclusive approach to education reform. However, the same report stressed that long-term gains require sustainable investment in teacher development, school infrastructure, and learning materials to prevent overcrowding and maintain quality standards. From a policy perspective, the results of this study imply that continued government support is essential to sustain and enhance the gains achieved through the implementation of Fee-Free Education. To maintain this positive trajectory, the government should prioritize continuous professional development for teachers to ensure quality instruction, expand school infrastructure to effectively accommodate the growing number of enrolled students, and strengthen accountability systems to guarantee the efficient and transparent use of capitation grants in meeting educational needs.

4.1.2 Inferential Statistics: T-Test Analysis

The one-sample t-test results provide strong statistical evidence confirming the significance of the observed improvements in students' academic performance in the Dodoma district.

Table 3: One-Sample Test of Students' Academic Performance Before and After FFE (2014)

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
BEFORE (2014)	10	121.41	9.57	3.03
AFTER (2024)	10	189.77	22.23	7.03
	T	Df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference
BEFORE (2014)	40.107	9	0.000	121.41
AFTER (2024)	26.995	9	0.000	189.77

Source: Field Data, 2025

The results in Table 3 show that academic performance in Dodoma's primary schools significantly improved from a mean score of 121.41 in 2014 (before FFE) to 189.77 in 2024 (after FFE), with both means statistically significant ($p < 0.001$). This sharp increase in average gain of over 68 points strongly supports the conclusion that the implementation of Fee-Free Education (FFE) has had a measurable and positive impact on student learning outcomes. From a statistical perspective, the high t-values ($t = 40.107$ for 2014 and $t = 26.995$ for 2024) suggest that the observed means are not due to random variation but reflect real differences over time. This performance boost is likely attributed to the elimination of financial barriers that previously hindered access to education, especially for students from low-income households. Consequently, student attendance, motivation, and teacher commitment may have increased, contributing to improved academic achievement. These results are in line with previous studies across Sub-Saharan Africa, such as Bold et al. (2019), who found that fee abolition in Kenya and Uganda led to higher enrolment and modest performance gains in rural schools. Likewise, UNESCO (2023) emphasized that for FFE policies to succeed, they must be accompanied by investments in infrastructure and teacher capacity factors that may explain the gains observed in Dodoma. Kattan and Burnett (2021) further argue that when supported by systemic reforms, free education initiatives can yield substantial academic returns in developing contexts. Overall, the findings from this study indicate that the FFE policy in Tanzania has positively transformed the learning landscape over the past decade, reflecting good academic improvement and offering strong justification for sustained policy and resource commitment.

4.2.3 Qualitative Findings

Qualitative responses reinforce the quantitative findings, particularly those illustrated in Table 4.3, which showed a significant increase in average academic performance from 121.41 before FFE to 189.77 after its implementation. During the interview with the Head Teacher of School A, when asked about academic

performance before and after the implementation of Fee Free Education (FFE), he stated that,

“There has been some change; performance has slightly improved compared to before free education.” (Interview with Head Teacher in school A, April 2025)

The headteacher's description of performance having “slightly improved” supports the notion that while the policy yielded tangible academic gains, these were perceived as modest on the ground. This reflects an experienced perspective, rooted in daily interactions with students, suggesting that although test scores have risen, the lived experience of improvement may still be tempered by ongoing structural limitations. The implication here is that the FFE policy has potentially improved learning conditions by increasing access and attendance, which in turn may contribute to better academic results. However, the modest nature of the improvement reported may also highlight underlying challenges such as overcrowded classrooms, inadequate teaching materials, or increased workload for teachers, factors commonly associated with fee abolition policies in developing contexts (World Bank, 2021). This view aligns with studies by Oketch and Rolleston (2020a), who found that although access improves under free education policies, quality often remains uneven without concurrent investment in infrastructure and teacher capacity. Similarly, Uwezo (2022) notes that in Tanzania, the initial success of FFE in boosting enrolment was not always matched by corresponding improvements in learning outcomes, especially in under-resourced schools.

Another Head Teacher added that,

“Before free education, performance was already good, but now it has improved because schools are full and no child is left out in the community.” (Interview with

headteacher of school B, April 2025)

This response highlights an important dual outcome of the Free Fee Education (FFE) policy: the maintenance of pre-existing academic standards and an inclusive expansion of access. The statement suggests that even schools that had already demonstrated strong academic outcomes benefited from the FFE initiative, not necessarily through direct academic interventions, but by ensuring that education was more equitable and widely available. The implication here is that FFE not only benefits underperforming schools but also has a reinforcing effect on already high-performing institutions, as it enhances resource availability, improves enrolment consistency, and strengthens instructional continuity (Sabates et al., 2019; Al-Samarrai & Zaman, 2020). Increased enrolment (“schools are full”) indicates that barriers to access were significantly reduced, potentially contributing to a more diverse and representative student body (Bold et al., 2017; Twaweza, 2020). This inclusivity is essential in promoting education as a universal right and aligns with Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG4), which advocates for inclusive and equitable quality education. This insight corresponds with findings by Sabates et al. (2019), who argue that free education policies in Sub-Saharan Africa have the potential to drive both equity and learning gains when effectively supported. Similarly, the study by Orodho (2021) in Kenya found that free education increased participation and maintained academic performance in many well-managed schools, suggesting that policy impact is not uniform but can be positive across varying school contexts.

During the interview with the Head Teacher of School C, when asked about changes in student performance, the head teacher stated that,

“Performance has improved compared to before, because now services have been improved... there are books, learning materials, and although it's not enough, the government is recruiting more teachers.” (Interview with Head Teacher of school C, April 2025)

This response highlights the perceived relationship between enhanced educational services and improved academic outcomes. The Head Teacher notes that the availability of books, learning materials, and increased teacher recruitment are contributing to the observed rise in student performance. Although the resources may still

be insufficient, their increased availability marks a significant improvement from the pre-FFE period.

From an interpretive standpoint, this suggests that FFE is not only easing the financial burden for families but is also facilitating systemic improvements that directly affect classroom learning. The recruitment of more teachers can lead to reduced student–teacher ratios, more individualized attention, and improved instructional quality. The increase in instructional materials like textbooks also supports better curriculum coverage and student engagement. This is in alignment with the understanding that access without quality inputs cannot yield sustainable improvements in learning outcomes.

These findings are consistent with studies such as that of Bold et al. (2017), which assert that improved school inputs, especially qualified teachers and adequate materials, play a significant role in boosting student learning in Sub-Saharan Africa. Likewise, the 2023 UNESCO Global Education Monitoring Report emphasizes that effective implementation of free education policies must go hand in hand with continued investment in teaching infrastructure to achieve both access and quality learning.

During the focus group discussions with teachers from School A and School B, it was observed that they all agreed that students' academic performance had improved following the implementation of Free Fee Education (FFE), alongside a significant increase in student enrollment. In School A, P1 said that,

“Academic performance has improved, and the number of students has increased significantly,” (P1 participant from FGD of School A, April 2025)

This observation highlights a dual impact of the FFE policy: not only has access to education expanded, as reflected by the surge in student numbers, but there is also a perceived positive shift in learning outcomes. The increase in enrollment demonstrates the policy’s success in removing financial barriers, encouraging more children to attend school. However, the concurrent improvement in academic performance suggests that the educational system, at least in these schools, has managed to accommodate the increased demand without compromising, and perhaps even enhancing, the quality of education.

From an analytical standpoint, these findings imply that FFE has fostered a more inclusive learning environment, where increased participation does not necessarily dilute

instructional quality. The teachers' positive assessment underscores the potential for well-implemented policies to simultaneously address access and quality, which are often seen as competing priorities in education reform. This aligns with recent studies, such as those by Mbiti and Muralidharan (2021), who found that free education programs in East Africa led to higher enrollment and improved student outcomes when accompanied by adequate resource support. Likewise, the UNESCO Global Education Monitoring Report (2023) notes that policies reducing cost barriers can yield significant gains in both enrollment and learning achievements when matched with investments in teaching and learning materials.

In School B, teachers observed a clear improvement in student academic performance following the implementation of Free Fee Education (FFE). One teacher (P1) noted,

“Performance has improved more than before FFE because people were previously discouraged by school costs.”
(P1 participant from FGD of School B, April 2025)

This statement highlights how the removal of school fees has reduced financial barriers, encouraging more children to attend school and thus positively impacting overall performance.

5. Conclusion and Recommendations

5.1 Conclusion

In conclusion, the findings provide clear evidence that the implementation of Fee-Free Education in Dodoma has positively impacted students' academic performance, with all schools showing significant improvements in mean scores over 10 years. The results can be considered good and promising, reflecting a successful policy intervention that has enhanced learning outcomes, promoted equity, and created a more inclusive educational environment. Nonetheless, to maintain this positive trajectory, there is a need for strategic investments, especially in areas such as teacher capacity building and educational resource provision. Ensuring that students not only attend school but also receive quality education is critical for realizing the broader goals of equity, retention, and academic excellence in Tanzania's education system. Therefore, the FFE policy in Tanzania stands as a critical step toward achieving Sustainable Development Goal 4, ensuring inclusive and equitable quality education for all.

5.2 Recommendations

From the findings, this study recommends that:

1. The government strengthen the implementation of Fee-Free Education (FFE) by addressing the quality-related challenges observed. Specifically, there should be deliberate efforts to recruit and deploy more qualified teachers to reduce overcrowded classrooms and improve teacher-to-pupil ratios.
2. Additionally, the government should ensure adequate provision of textbooks, teaching aids, and other essential learning materials, particularly in early grades where foundational skills are developed. These actions will help improve the learning environment and enhance the academic performance of primary school pupils under the FFE policy.
3. From the findings, this study also recommends investing in the expansion and rehabilitation of school infrastructure to accommodate the growing number of students. This includes building more classrooms, providing enough desks, and improving sanitation facilities.
4. Furthermore, the Ministry of Education should establish robust monitoring and evaluation frameworks to assess both access and quality outcomes regularly.
5. Community participation and collaboration with development partners should be encouraged to support local schools with additional resources and ensure the sustainability of FFE. By integrating these strategies, the government can ensure that Fee-Free Education not only promotes access but also supports academic success for all learners.

References

- Al-Samarrai, S., & Zaman, H. (2020). Free primary education and equity outcomes in Sub-Saharan Africa. *International Journal of Educational Development*, 73, 102112. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijedudev.2019.102112>.
- Bold, T., Kimenyi, M., Mwabu, G., Ng'wanakilala, F., & Twaweza. (2017). Free education policies and student outcomes in Sub-Saharan Africa. *International Journal of Educational Development*, 52, 1–15.

<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijedudev.2016.10.005>

<https://doi.org/10.30918/AERJ.81.20.017>

- Bold, T., Kimenyi, M., Mwabu, G., Ng'wanakilala, F., & Twaweza. (2019). Fee abolition impacts on enrollment and performance in Kenya and Uganda. *International Journal of Educational Development*, 68, 1–12. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijedudev.2019.02.006>
- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2019). *Successful qualitative research: A practical guide for beginners* (3rd ed.). Sage Publications.
- Creswell, J. W., & Creswell, J. D. (2018). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approach* (5th ed.). Sage Publications.
- Duah, Y. G., Mensah, P., Poku, F., & Damte, T. (2023). Effects of increased student enrollment on teaching and learning in Ghanaian senior high schools. *Education Economics*, 31(4), 421–438. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09645292.2023.2175332>
- Kattan, R., & Burnett, N. (2021). Academic returns of free education policies in developing contexts. *Education Economics*, 29(6), 520–540. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09645292.2021.1917439>
- Kvale, S., & Brinkmann, S. (2015). *InterViews: Learning the craft of qualitative research interviewing* (3rd ed.). Sage Publications.
- Lazaro, P., & Matiku, R. (2022). Effectiveness of fee-free secondary education policy in Morogoro Municipality, Tanzania. *Tanzania Journal of Education*, 19(2), 45–62.
- Luvanga, J. (2022). Administration and management of fee-free education. *Tanzanian Journal of Public Policy*, 8(4), 77–92.
- Lyanga, T., & Chen, X. (2020). Impacts of the fee-free education policy on junior secondary schools in Tanzania. *African Educational Research Journal*, 8(1), 33–50.
- Maobe, B., Bogonko, R., & Ondigi, S. (2019). Free day secondary education (FDSE) funding and student academic performance in Kenya. *Kenya Journal of Educational Research*, 7(1), 15–29.
- Mbiti, I., & Muralidharan, K. (2021). Free education and student outcomes in East Africa. *Journal of Development Economics*, 152, 102120. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jdeveco.2021.102120>
- Marwa, S. (2019). Infrastructure challenges in Tanzanian primary schools. *Journal of Education and Development in Africa*, 5(2), 101–115.
- Miles, M. B., Huberman, A. M., & Saldaña, J. (2019). *Qualitative data analysis: A methods sourcebook* (4th ed.). Sage Publications.
- Mnyeti, P. (2023). Impact of fee-free education on public secondary schools in Chamwino District, Tanzania. *Journal of Education and Development*, 14(3), 55–70.
- Moshoeshoe, M., Ardington, C., & Piraino, P. (2019). Lesotho's free primary education program: Enrollment and grade attainment. *Southern African Review of Education*, 25(3), 211–230.
- Mrema, E. (2019). Enrollment and resource allocation in Tanzanian primary education. *Education Policy Analysis*, 11(2), 33–48.
- Mwinuka, T. (2023). Effects of fee-free education policy on academic performance in Kisarawe District, Tanzania. *International Journal of Educational Research*, 12(2), 81–95.
- Maliyamkono, T. (2017). Fee-free primary education: Policy and challenges in Tanzania. *Tanzania Educational Review*, 14(1), 12–28.
- Ndunguru, F. (2018). Stakeholder perceptions of free education policies in Tanzania. *African Educational Research Journal*, 6(2), 45–60.

- Nassoro, N., Komba, S., & Haji, A. (2020). Policy outcomes of free primary education in Tanzania. *International Journal of Education and Policy*, 9(3), 120–136.
- Nkosi, L. (2018). Academic performance assessment methods in African primary schools. *African Journal of Education*, 10(1), 21–35.
- Oketch, M., & Rolleston, C. (2020). Fee abolition in African schools: Impacts and challenges. *Comparative Education*, 56(2), 157–175. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03050068.2019.1703891>
- Orodho, J. (2021). Free primary education and participation in Kenya. *Educational Research Journal*, 15(1), 45–60.
- Pallant, J. (2020). *SPSS survival manual: A step-by-step guide to data analysis using IBM SPSS* (7th ed.). Routledge.
- Patton, M. Q. (2015). *Qualitative research & evaluation methods* (4th ed.). Sage Publications.
- Sabates, R., Akyeampong, K., & Westbrook, J. (2019). Equity and learning gains in Sub-Saharan Africa. *International Journal of Educational Development*, 68, 1–14. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijedudev.2019.02.007>
- Shah, P., & Steinberg, L. (2019). Impact of India's Right to Education Act on school enrollment and academic outcomes. *International Journal of Educational Development*, 65, 45–60. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijedudev.2018.12.004>
- Tabachnick, B. G., & Fidell, L. S. (2001). *Using multivariate statistics* (4th ed.). Allyn & Bacon.
- Twaweza. (2020). *Education access and equity in Tanzania*. Twaweza.
- Uwezo. (2022). *The state of learning in Tanzania: Assessing progress and gaps*. Uwezo East Africa.
- United Republic of Tanzania (URT). (1995). *Education policy framework*. Government Printer.
- UNESCO. (2022). *Education for all: Global trends in access and achievement*. UNESCO.
- UNESCO. (2023). *Global education monitoring report 2023: Investment in education for sustainable development*. UNESCO.
- Veriava, F., & Paterson, J. (2020). Education as a fundamental human right: Historical and contemporary perspectives. *Journal of Human Rights*, 19(3), 320–335. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14754835.2020.1742435>
- World Bank. (2002). *Education for all: Policies and strategies*. World Bank.
- World Bank. (2021). *Improving education outcomes in Sub-Saharan Africa: Policy priorities and opportunities*. World Bank.
- World Bank. (2022). *Tanzania's fee-free education policy: Lessons from Sub-Saharan Africa*. World Bank.
- Yin, R. K. (2018). *Case study research and applications: Design and methods* (6th ed.). Sage Publications.