



INVOLVEMENT OF TEACHER UNIONS IN THE RE-ENTRY POLICY FORMULATION IN ZAMBIA

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ABSTRACT

Literature we reviewed indicated that, during the formulation of the re-entry policy in Zambia, teacher unions; Zambia National Union of Teachers (ZNUT) and Secondary School Teachers Union of Zambia (SESTUZ), were involved. However, literature remained unclear on how the two unions were involved in the process. Based on this ground, we conducted this study to establish how the teacher unions were involved in the formulation of the re-entry policy in Zambia. In this study we adopted three major dimensions of the research process ontology, epistemology and axiology. We employed used a qualitative case study design. The study was done in Zambia on a sample drawn from schools, zones, districts and provinces which conveniently sampled. The study population consisted of people 20 Teacher Union Representatives drawn from Zambia National Union of Teachers (ZNUT) and Secondary School Teachers Union of Zambia (SESTUZ) and directors drawn from the Ministry of General Education (MoGE) Department respectively. This study employed the recommendations of both Creswell (1998) and Morse (1994) to determine the sample size. We sampled of 26 participants. However, due to saturation, only 11 union representatives and 4 directors were interviewed. Data was collected from all participants using interviews guides. Thematic analysis was used to analyse the data. The study was ethically cleared with the University of Zambia Directorate of Research and Graduate Studies. The study found that Teacher unions, such as ZNUT and SESTUZ, were actively involved in the formulation of the re-entry policy, participating in consultations, advocacy, lobbying, support for implementation, and monitoring and evaluation of the policy. Their involvement was crucial in shaping the policy and ensuring it is responsive to the needs of girls who dropped out of school. Their contributions included advocating for the rights of teachers and learners, supporting policy implementation, and providing input during the formulation process. The study highlights the importance of involving teacher unions in education policy formulation and implementation, as their input is essential for policies to be effective, practical, and inclusive, benefiting teachers, students, and the education system as a whole.

KEY WORDS: Re-entry policy, teacher unions, education policy formulation, girls' education, gender equality, inclusive education, dropout prevention, policy implementation, marginalized learners, stakeholder collaboration, policy development.

INTRODUCTION

Modern states, especially under conditions of globalization are continuously engaged in reforming their education systems. These reforms aim to improve teaching and learning outcomes, quality of education, equity in education, the internal efficiency and effectiveness of the education systems, and global competitiveness (Sahlberg, 2006; Adamson, Astrand and Darling-Hammond, 2016; Zajda, 2021). They set out to make the education systems more relevant and responsive to the current challenges and future needs of society (Sahlberg, 2006; Adamson, Astrand and Darling-Hammond, 2016). With the attainment of independence in Zambia in 1964, the Ministry of Education embarked upon major educational reforms. These included the reorganization of the management and administration of the education system to reflect the changed political context, reform of the curriculum, the implementation of a new language policy for Zambian schools, introduction of a new examination and assessment system, and introduction of a new basic education teacher diploma. These reforms were comprehensive, and covered all aspects and levels of education and were mostly implemented during the period 1965 to 1996 (Elliot, 1975; Kaluba, 1990; Kabanze, 2012; Hambulo and Mukalula-Kalumbi, 2017; Mambwe and Lufungulo, 2022).

Education is seen as playing a key role in poverty reduction. Education lays a foundation of sustained economic growth. There is a close parallel between the rates of economic growth of a country and the overall level of education of its economically active population (Abramovitz, 1989; Hanushek and Wößmann, 2007; Galor, 2011; Friedman, 2017). Education enhances lives and ends generational cycles of poverty and disease and provides a foundation for sustainable development (Sianesi and Reenen, 2003). Furthermore, quality education equips boys and girls with the knowledge and skills necessary to adopt healthy lifestyles, protect themselves from HIV/Aids and take an active role in social, economic and political decision-making as they transition to adolescence



and adulthood (Sianesi and Reenen, 2003). Educated adults are more likely to have fewer children, to be informed about appropriate child-rearing practices and to ensure that their children start school on time and are ready to learn (Kabanze, 2012).

Since independence, Zambia has had three teacher unions, known as Zambia National Union of Teachers (ZNUT), Secondary School Teachers Union of Zambia (SESTUZ) and Basic School Teachers Union of Zambia (BETUZ) (Chishimba, 2015; Habeenzu, 2016; Kasuba, 2016; Simuyaba, 2020a; Nzala, 2022a; Kabika *et al.*, no date). Along with formulated policies and guidelines of doing the education business in Zambia, these unions are established to ensure that education is provided with the expected standards and to protect all players in the education system; ensure equity and equality in the access of education between boys and girls, policies and unions are put in place (Phiri, 2013). One of the key policies formulated in country is the Re-entry policy. The re-entry policy as a measure and recognition of the importance of addressing gender inequalities in national development and the need to narrow the gender gap in education was introduced on October 13, 1997 (Sinkala, Simui and Muleya, 2022a).

Literature further indicates that, involvement of teacher unions in policy formulation process could lead to transparency, full stakeholder engagement, increased opportunities for improvement, potential policy balance, few challenges in implementation, higher understanding of education system realities, less legal and ethical concerns, increased ownership and support for the policy, and ultimately, a higher quality of education and student well-being (Sinkala, Simui and Muleya, 2022a). If teacher unions are not involved, policymakers might unintentionally introduce bias, and policies might disproportionately affect certain groups. Furthermore, the policy may face resistance from teachers and other stakeholders, reducing its effectiveness and legitimacy (Habeenzu, 2016). Conducting this study is essential to ensure policies are well-informed, equitable, and effectively implemented, thereby safeguarding the quality of education and addressing legal and ethical considerations in the policy-making process.

For this reason, the then, two present teacher unions ZANUT and SESTUZ, were involved in the formulation of the re-entry policy. However, literature remained unclear on how the two unions were involved in the formulation of the re-entry policy. We conducted this study therefore, to provide a comprehensive understanding of how teacher unions actively participated in the formulation of Zambia's Re-Entry Policy. Through a thorough exploration of their roles and contributions, the study intended to provide a deeper understanding of the dynamics between teacher unions and educational policymaking, with the overarching goal of fostering an inclusive and equitable educational system that supports the reintegration of all students into learning environments.

SUMMARY LITERATURE REVIEW

Involvement of Teacher Unions in Education Policy Formulation

Barber (1996) argues that teacher unions are engaged in both unionism and professionalism. He suggests that the roles of teacher unions are not confined to the traditional functions of improved working and living conditions, but expand to include participation in education policy. He observes that it is because of these two interrelated functions that trade union leaders sometimes make a distinction between what are termed “trade union functions” and “professional functions.”

McDonnell and Pascal (1988) who did a comprehensive assessment on teacher union activities in the United States of America with regards to education policies in the 1980s, suggest that teacher unions could take three possible stands towards education reform. Firstly, they could oppose or resist the reform policies which challenge their traditional interests. Secondly, they could adapt to the new circumstances and accommodate various reform options espoused by others. Thirdly, they could accept the educational policies, and play an active role in shaping new approaches to teacher policies.

The literature reveals three contending views on teacher unions and education policies. The first view argues that teacher unions do participate and play meaningful roles during educational policies (Kuja, 2022; Nzala, 2022b). The second group suggests that teachers and teacher unions are not considered, and do not participate or play any meaningful role during educational policies (Kudumo, 2011 and Mutuku, 2015). The third extreme position posits that teacher unions are destructive and self-serving, and do not play any positive role whatsoever in education (McDonnell and Pascal, 1988; Chishimba, 2015; Collinson and Tourish, 2015; Zajda, 2021). These are the views out there in the literature on which the study focused in this section.

The Planning Theory

The Planning Theory underpinned this Study. Planning Theory suggests integration, consensus seeking and project approaches towards pursuing public policy processes which entail implementation of public policies. This is in line with Van Baalen (2006) who argues that the project approach to collaborative nature of the planning theory warrants that the Re-Entry Policy be coordinated through on-going activities and projects. This suggests that the Re-Entry Policy, embracing collaboration that appeals to projects, indicates the scope,



quality and time, all of which are suggestive of a cycle of events with specific Re-Entry Policy deliverables (Abram, 2000; Fainstein, 2000; Allmendinger and Tewdwr-Jones, 2005; Faludi, 2013).

METHODS

Research Paradigm

In this study we adopted three major dimensions of the research process ontology, epistemology and axiology (Naeem, 2020). We employed used a qualitative case study design. The study was done in Zambia on a sample drawn from schools, zones, districts and provinces which conveniently sampled. The study population consisted of people 20 Teacher Union Representatives drawn from Zambia National Union of Teachers (ZNUT) and Secondary School Teachers Union of Zambia (SESTUZ) and directors drawn from the Ministry of General Education (MoGE) Department respectively. This study employed the recommendations of both Creswell (1998) and Morse (1994) to determine the sample size for the qualitative research. By considering these two recommendations we sampled of 26 participants(Onwuegbuzie and Leech, 2007; Mason, 2010; Omona, 2013; Kumar, Kumar and PRABHU, 2020; Bekele and Ago, 2022). However, due to saturation, only11 union representatives and 4 directors were interviewed. Data was collected from all participants using interviews guides. Thematic analysis was used to analyse the data. To address validity, we ensured content validity by designing interview questions based on an extensive literature review and the study's conceptual framework. Construct validity was strengthened by triangulating data from various sources and methods (Franklin and Ballan, 2001). The study was ethically cleared with the University of Zambia Directorate of Research and Graduate Studies.

Findings

Considering the theoretical framework that served as the study's foundation as well as the study's specific objective, which was to explore how teacher unions were involved in the formulation of the Re-Entry Policy. **Table 1** outlines the all the stated themes and sub-themes which guides the analysis.

Table 1: Study Themes

Objective	Major Theme	Sub Themes
1. To explore how teacher unions were involved in the Re-Entry Policy formulation in Zambia.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Teacher unions' involvement in the Re-Entry Policy formulation in Zambia. ➤ Other ways in which Teacher Unions Could have been involved in the Re-entry Policy ➤ Contributions of teacher Unions to the re-entry policy 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Consultation and Participation - Advocacy and lobbying - Support for implementation - Monitoring and evaluation - Conducting Surveys - Monitoring Implementation - Task Force or Working Group Creation - Surveys and Feedback Collection - Pilot Programs and Demonstrations - Collaboration with other Stakeholders and Advocating for Policy Changes - Providing Resources and Guidance - Advocacy for the rights of teachers and learners - Consultation and participation in policy development - Support for implementation

Teacher Unions Involvement in the Re-Entry Policy formulation

Findings of the study indicate that Teacher Unions were involved at different stages in the formulation of the Re-Entry Policy. The involvement of teacher unions in the formulation of the Re-Entry Policy in Zambia has been crucial in ensuring that the policy is responsive to the needs of girls who have dropped out of school and that it is implemented effectively. Their input and support helped to shape the policy and ensure that it is inclusive, adequately resourced, and supportive of both learners and teachers. Respondents indicated that the involvement of teacher unions in the formulation of the policy can be seen in several ways:



Consultation and Participation

R1, R4, R7, and R8 “indicated that Teacher Unions were consulted during the development of the Re-Entry Policy, and their input was taken into account in shaping the final policy. Through their participation in policy development, Teacher Unions helped to ensure that the policy was grounded in the realities of the education system and would be feasible to implement”.

R1 R2 R3 R4 R 5 R6 and R9 “indicated that teacher unions were involvement, at the formulation of any policy in the ministry of Education as they act as proprietors influencing the government to implement this policy to encourage girl child complete education. Unions are critical stakeholders and as such, they are always part and parcel of policy formation. ZNUT and SESTUZ were fully engaged in the policy formulation process even up to the launch of the policy”.

R7, R8, R10 and R11 “indicated that Teacher Unions were involved during the research, most of the teachers who are members of the Unions were involved; through debates, parliamentary presentation and advocating for the policy actualization through parliamentary side line meetings and policy stakeholder meetings as well as through write – up and submissions of research findings to the ministry of education. In addition, the Teachers Unions have been involved in the sensitization of the policy across the country. Recently, the National Assembly engaged the Union to do a survey on the implementation and effectiveness of the policy and report was submitted accordingly”.

Advocacy and lobbying

R2 and R4 “stated that teacher unions played a key role in advocating for the rights of girls who have dropped out of school and pushing for policies to address this problem. They lobbied government officials, policymakers, and other stakeholders to prioritize the issue and to take action to address it”.

Support for implementation

R7 and R3 “said that teacher unions have provided support for the implementation of the Re-Entry Policy, including training for teachers and school administrators on how to implement the policy effectively. This has helped to ensure that the policy is implemented in a way that is supportive of girls who have dropped out of school”.

Monitoring and evaluation

R4 and R6 indicated that “teacher unions have also played a role in monitoring and evaluating the implementation of the policy to ensure that it is effective and meeting the needs of learners. They have provided feedback to policymakers and other stakeholders on how the policy can be improved over time. Monitoring Implementation: Teacher unions could have monitored the implementation of re-entry policies to ensure that they are being carried out effectively and fairly. This could include conducting site visits, reviewing data on student and staff attendance, and collecting feedback from teachers and other stakeholders”.

“The Re- entry became inevitable in 1987 as a text of low levels of educational attainment among women and girls Zambia, in particular rural areas unions should have been asked or given an assignment to sensitize their members on appreciating girls with babies in their classrooms; Being with the first step of the process. i.e crafting the Road – map, conducting the needs assessment together with other stake-holders. Attendance list, reports, minutes can be found if time was given to do a search; Ways (in conducting needs assessment and sensitization of the policy in question; pre-sensitization and engagement of the members at all levels up to the school” (**DC1, DC2, DC3, and DC4**).

Other ways in which Teacher Unions Could have been involved in the Re-entry Policy

It was established that actively involving teacher unions in all stages of the re-entry policy could have yielded huge benefits from their expertise, on-the-ground experiences, and commitment to supporting their members. This collaborative approach could result in policies a policy that is more comprehensive, effective, and responsive to all the needs of teachers and students. The findings of the study indicate that, other than being involved in the consultation, advocacy and lobbying, support for implementation, and monitoring and evaluation of the re-entry policy, teacher unions could have played a role in; the representation in policy task force, surveys and feedback collection, expertise and research, piloting programs and demonstrations, task force or working group creation, collaboration with other stakeholders, advocating for policy changes, and providing resources and guidance. Respondents indicated that:

Task Force or Working Group Creation

“...Teacher unions could establish their own task forces or working groups specifically dedicated to analyzing and providing recommendations on re-entry policies. These groups could bring together teachers, union representatives, educational experts, and



other stakeholders to conduct in-depth discussions, research, and analysis... the findings and recommendations generated by these groups can then be shared with policymakers to inform their decision-making” (R11, R2 and R6). R8 indicated that “...Teacher unions could have representation on policy task forces or committees responsible for formulating and implementing the re-entry policy. This would ensure that the perspectives and concerns of teachers and indeed, students, are directly incorporated into the decision-making processes...union representatives could actively participate in discussions, contribute ideas, and advocate for the best interests of their members”.

Surveys and Feedback Collection

“Teacher unions could conduct surveys or gather feedback from their members to understand their views, preferences, and concerns regarding the re-entry policy. This information could be shared with policymakers and administrators to inform the formulation and of the policy. The unions could collect data on issues such as health and safety measures, instructional strategies, scheduling preferences, and support needs for student and the teachers for the successful implementation of the policy...” (R1 and R5). “...Teacher unions often have access to educational research and experts in the field. They could provide policymakers with research-based recommendations and evidence on effective re-entry strategies. This information could help shape the policy formulation process, ensuring that decisions are grounded in sound educational principles and practice” (R11, and R2).

Pilot Programs and Demonstrations

“Teacher unions could collaborate with school districts to design and implement pilot programs or demonstrations of different re-entry approaches. This could have allowed for practical testing of strategies and gathering data on their effectiveness. The unions could use the results from these initiatives to provide input and inform the policy formulation process” (R5, R7, and R9).

Collaboration with other Stakeholders and Advocating for Policy Changes

“...Teacher unions could have collaborated with other education stakeholders, such as parent-teacher associations, school boards, and community organizations, to jointly formulate the re-entry policy...by working together, these groups can bring diverse perspectives, share insights, and collaborate on finding solutions that address the needs of teachers, students, and the broader community” (R1 and R3). R1 and R10 said that “Teacher unions could have advocated for policy changes at the state or national level to support the safe and effective re-entry for both students and teachers in schools. This could include advocating for increased funding for education, changes to testing and assessment of policies, and support for mental health services”.

Providing Resources and Guidance

R5, R8, and R10, 11 and R3 respectively, stated that “Teacher unions could have provided resources and guidance to teachers on how to implement re-entry policies in their classrooms. This could include resources on teaching strategies, safety protocols, and addressing student learning loss; over the year he Ministry of Education has always involved Unions as important stake holders in the education sector; unions must ensure that the re-entry policy should be part of the law to ensure that all girls involved must get back to school. In addition, they have to play are big role in monitoring schools to fully appreciating the impact of the policy on the ground; union could be involved in the statistical evaluations so that the true picture of the impact of the re-entry policy is appreciated; it is clear that the teacher Unions have been involved in the sensitization of the policy. ...However, there is serious need that implementation and effectiveness of the policy is consistently surveyed”.

DC1, DC2, and DC4 stated that “...There is no policy which is formulated planers the involvement of trade leaders Unions involvement. The process was fully consultative. Teachers unions who were in existence. Namely ZNUT and SESTUZ. Correspondent 4 Teachers are key stake-holders hence their involvement being critical. Through a consultative process the Union teachers were fully involved. They were invited to attend high stake-holders meeting which included FAWEZA, teacher Unions, the Ministry and others up to the validation of the policy document”.

Contributions of Teacher Unions in Formulating the Re-Entry Policy

The Re-entry Policy in Zambia, which aims to provide educational opportunities for girls who have dropped out of school due to pregnancy or other reasons, was developed with the input of a wide range of stakeholders, including teacher unions. Findings show that advocacy for the rights of teachers and learners, consultation and participation in policy development, and support for implementation are the general contributions union made towards the re-entry policy. The contributions of teacher unions in the formulation of the policy was reported by different respondents:



Advocacy for the rights of teachers and learners

R1, R3, R6, R9, and 10 said that “Teacher unions in Zambia have been vocal advocates for the rights of teachers and learners, including girls who have dropped out of school. Through their advocacy efforts, they helped to draw attention to the issue of school dropouts and pushed for policies to address this problem”.

Consultation and participation in policy development

R11, R4, R8, and R5 indicated that “...teacher unions were consulted during the development of the Re-entry Policy, and their input was considered in shaping the final policy. Through their participation in policy development, teacher unions helped to ensure that the policy was grounded in the realities of the education system and would be feasible to implement...”.

Support for implementation

R3 and R7 alluded that “teacher unions provided support for the implementation of the policy, including training for teachers and school administrators on how to implement the policy effectively and this helped to ensure that the policy is implemented in a way that is supportive of girls who have dropped out of school”.

DC1 “There are always wide consultations to which the unions are a part. Some names of unions who concisely attended the meeting when drafting Re-entry were captured if any.

DC 2 Contribution of Data Representation. Sensitization (so that the policy was understood by the teachers and school management so that it was received smoothly at implementation especially with the teachers who seemly come out to being the ones in contact with the girls (mothers). **DC 3** Assist in implementation that Sensitization Helped in the implementation that will help prevent the exclusion of young mothers furthering their education. **DC 4** “Provision of data (statistics after their independent case – study”.

DISCUSSION

From the findings of this study, it was established that only two teacher unions were involved in the re-entry policy; ZNUT and SESTUZ. Furthermore, the study findings highlight the active participation of Teacher Unions at various stages during the development of the Re-Entry Policy. It was reported that they were involved in consultation and participation, advocacy and lobbying, implementation, and monitoring and evaluation. Their involvement played a vital role in making the policy responsive to the needs of girls who have discontinued their education and ensuring its effective implementation. The input and support provided by the teacher unions is seen to have been instrumental in shaping an inclusive, well-resourced, and supportive policy for both learners and teachers. Similarly, teacher unions in Latin America get involved in policy process. It is well understood that the levels of involvement differ country by county. Despite minor differences however, there are similarities in the involvement of teacher unions in education policies. As such, Teacher unions in Latin America are involved in political lobbying, collective bargaining and support for the development of new education practices. And just like in Zambia, Teachers Unions in Latin America shape educational policies through their involvement in interest groups, and professional associations, or through government policy forums (Marginson and Rhoades, 2002)

While this study reports appreciation of the involvement of teacher unions, Reimers and Reimers in (1996), quoted by Sinkala, Simui and Muleya, (2022), reported the marginalization and alienation of teachers who are tasked with implementing educational change. According to these authors (Reimers and Reimers), teachers and teacher unions often have limited influence over contemporary educational policies, and their expertise and knowledge are often disregarded. As a result, the perspectives of other stakeholders, such as policymakers, development partners, and international consultants, carry more weight and ultimately shape educational policies in many developing countries. The observations of Reimers and Reimers suggest a need for greater collaboration and understanding between policymakers and teachers. It is essential for policymakers to recognize the expertise and experiences of teachers and involve them in the policy-making process. By including teachers' perspectives, policymakers can gain insights into the practical implications of their policies and ensure that they are more effectively implemented.

Based on available literature, there are three contrasting perspectives on the involvement of teacher unions in education policies. These views offer different insights into the level of participation of teacher unions and the impact they have on educational policies. The first viewpoint, supported by Ramokgotswa, (2015); Bascia and Stevenson, (2017); and Dwangu, (2018), argues that teacher unions actively participate and have significant roles in the development and implementation of educational policies. This perspective suggests that teacher unions positively influence policy discussions by advocating for the interests of teachers. They contribute constructively to the formulation of policies.



In contrast, the second perspective, put forward by Kallaway (2007), suggests that teachers and their unions are often ignored and excluded from the process of educational policy-making (Matos, 2022). According to this view, policymakers and other stakeholders tend to overlook or dismiss the input and perspectives of teachers and their unions when shaping policies. The third viewpoint represents an extreme position that portrays teacher unions as detrimental and self-serving. Advocates of this perspective, such as Hess, (2011); Verger, Fontdevila and Zancajo, (2016); and Maharaj and Bascia, (2021) argue that teacher unions primarily focus on protecting the interests of their members, which can hinder educational reforms and innovation. This viewpoint contends that teacher unions have no positive role to play in education. These three contrasting views provide valuable insights into the involvement of teacher unions in education policies. By considering these perspectives, policymakers and researchers can gain a more comprehensive understanding of the complex dynamics between teacher unions and educational policy-making processes.

The critical issues highlighted here are that, policymakers often lack a comprehensive understanding of the classroom realities and the conditions in which educational changes are expected to occur. They may not be familiar with the specific challenges and dynamics that teachers and learners face on a daily basis. Consequently, the lack of familiarity can lead to a disconnect between the intended policy outcomes and the actual implementation in classrooms. It therefore, suffices to state that teachers and teacher unions often have limited influence in shaping educational policies, leading to a disconnect between policymakers and the classroom realities. To bridge this gap, it is crucial for policymakers to acknowledge and incorporate teachers' knowledge and experiences to ensure that educational policies are more relevant and successfully implemented.

Even though the current study indicates that teacher unions were involved in many facets of the re-entry policy, some respondents indicated that, the unions were not involved in all the stages of the policy. In addition to their involvement in consultation, advocacy, lobbying, support for implementation, and monitoring and evaluation of the re-entry policy, the study findings further indicate that teacher unions could have played a role in such ways as; Task Force or Working Group Creation, Surveys and Feedback Collection, Pilot Programs and Demonstrations, Collaboration with other Stakeholders and Advocating for Policy Changes, as well as Providing Resources and Guidance. However, the involvement of teacher unions in all stages of the re-entry policy could have yielded significant benefits based on their expertise, on-the-ground experiences, and commitment to supporting their members. This collaborative approach has the potential to result in a more comprehensive, effective, and responsive policy that addresses the needs of both teachers and students.

Barber (1996) supports the aforementioned views and emphasizes that the involvement of teacher unions in education is influenced by the unique characteristics of each country's education system and the historical relationship between teacher Unions and the state. He argues that the responses of teacher unions are shaped by specific contexts, including the social and political system and the power dynamics within teacher unions. Barber (1996) suggests that teacher unions are engaged in both unionism and professionalism, and their roles should extend beyond traditional concerns for improved working and living conditions. He proposes that teacher unions should actively participate in education policy-making. Trade union leaders sometimes distinguish between "trade union functions" and "professional functions" due to the intertwined nature of these roles. McDonnell and Pascal (1988) conducted a comprehensive assessment of teacher union activities in the United States during the 1980s and proposed three possible stances that teacher unions could adopt toward education reform. They could oppose or resist reform policies that challenge their traditional interests, adapt to new circumstances and accommodate various reform options, or accept educational policies and actively contribute to shaping new approaches to teacher policies.

The formulation of the Re-entry Policy in Zambia, with the objective of offering educational opportunities to girls who have discontinued their schooling due to pregnancy or other reasons, involved the active participation of various stakeholders, including teacher unions (Simuyaba, 2020a, 2020b; and Muyunda, 2021). The findings of the study indicate that teacher unions made significant contributions to the development of the policy, as reported by different respondents. Teacher unions played a vital role in advocating for the rights of both teachers and learners. They highlighted the importance of creating an inclusive and supportive environment for girls who have dropped out of school, ensuring that their right to education is upheld. Through their advocacy efforts, teacher unions aimed to address the challenges and barriers faced by these girls and promote equal opportunities in education. In addition, teacher unions actively engaged in consultations and participated in the policy development process. They provided their expertise, perspectives, and insights to shape the content and provisions of the re-entry policy. By actively participating in discussions and decision-making, teacher unions ensured that the policy reflected the needs and concerns of teachers and learners (Habeenzu, 2016; Simuyaba, 2020a; Muyunda, 2021; Thelma, Phiri and Mutepuka, 2023). Furthermore, teacher unions played a supportive role in the implementation of the re-entry policy. They provided guidance, resources, and assistance to ensure the effective execution of the policy at various levels, including at the school and community levels. This support aimed to facilitate the smooth reintegration of girls into the educational system and create an enabling environment for their continued learning.



The contributions of teacher unions in the formulation of the Re-entry Policy in Zambia, as reported by different respondents, demonstrate their commitment to promoting equitable access to education and addressing the specific challenges faced by girls who have dropped out of school. By actively advocating, participating, and supporting the implementation of the policy, teacher unions have been instrumental in shaping a policy that addresses the needs of the target population and promotes gender equality in education.

Teacher unions hold a crucial role as important stakeholders in education policy within Zambia, actively participating in the development and implementation of the country's re-entry policy (Chishimba, 2015; Habeenzu, 2016; Simuyaba, 2020a; Muyunda, 2021; Kuja, 2022; and Mazowa, 2022). These unions have made substantial contributions to the policy's purpose by advocating for the rights of teachers and emphasizing the importance of education for all individuals. Their involvement in policy development and implementation, including the re-entry policy, further demonstrates their commitment to the cause. Teacher Unions SESTUZ and ZNUT collaborated closely with the Ministry of General Education to ensure the effective implementation of the re-entry policy. ZNUT continuously has played an integral role in providing training and support to teachers and school administrators, equipping them with the necessary knowledge and skills to effectively implement the policy. Their efforts have focused on creating a safe and supportive learning environment for pregnant and parenting students, thereby promoting their continued education (Phiri, 2013; Shipota, 2014; Habeenzu, 2016; and Matos, 2022).

The respondents of the study unequivocally highlighted the significant role teacher unions played in the development and implementation of the re-entry policy in Zambia. Through their active involvement, these unions have been instrumental in ensuring the policy's effectiveness and its commitment to providing equal access to education for all individuals, specifically addressing the needs of girls who have dropped out of school. By collaborating with various education stakeholders, advocating for teachers' and students' rights, participating in policy development, and providing training and support, teacher unions have helped shape a re-entry policy that supports educational opportunities for pregnant and parenting students. Their contributions have been essential in fostering an inclusive and supportive educational environment that promotes access to education for all, irrespective of individual circumstances.

Bascia and Stevenson, (2017) argues that the contributions of teacher unions to educational policymaking correspond to the historical authority teachers have had in shaping the terms of their own practice. However, she notes that teacher unions often face challenges in establishing legitimacy and credibility within the educational policy system, as they are frequently portrayed by the media and policy researchers as lacking legitimate authority and being out of touch with relevant matters. Bascia highlights the limited empirical research on the roles of teacher unions in relation to education quality and suggests that many education policies overlook or inadequately consider the perspectives and contributions of teacher unions. Barber (1996), McDonnell and Pascal (1988), and Bascia (2005) provide additional insights into the involvement of teacher unions in education policies, highlighting the importance of contextual factors, the diverse roles of teacher unions, and the challenges they face in influencing policy decisions and establishing credibility within the educational policy system.

Linking the Study Results to the Theory

This study is grounded in the Planning Theory, which advocates for integration, consensus-seeking, and a project-oriented approach in public policy processes. Currin-McCulloch, (2019) perspective, emphasizing the collaborative nature of planning, aligns with the Re-Entry Policy's coordination through ongoing activities and projects. The study's findings, revealing teacher unions' involvement through consultation, advocacy, and support for implementation, resonate with the Planning Theory's principles. This approach mirrors a cycle of events with specific deliverables, emphasizing the scope, quality, and time considerations inherent in planning processes. Overall, the Planning Theory provides a conceptual framework that underscores the collaborative and project-based nature of Zambia's Re-Entry Policy, shedding light on the strategic and coordinated efforts required for effective policy formulation and implementation.

Contribution to the Body of Knowledge

The study contributes to a deeper understanding of the role of teacher unions in educational policy formulation, especially in the context of re-entry policies in Zambia. It provides valuable insights that can inform policymaking practices, enhance collaboration among stakeholders, and support evidence-based decision-making in the field of education. The knowledge gained from this study may also inspire further research and exploration of the dynamics between teacher unions and policy development in different educational contexts around the world.

CONCLUSION

The study focused on the involvement of teacher unions in the formulation of the re-entry policy in Zambia, which aims to provide educational opportunities for girls who have dropped out of school due to pregnancy or other reasons. The study found that Teacher unions, such as ZNUT and SESTUZ, were actively involved in the formulation of the re-entry policy, participating in consultations,



advocacy, lobbying, support for implementation, and monitoring and evaluation of the policy. Their involvement has been crucial in shaping the policy and ensuring it is responsive to the needs of girls who dropped out of school. Their contributions included advocating for the rights of teachers and learners, supporting policy implementation, and providing input during the formulation process. The study highlights the importance of involving teacher unions in education policy formulation and implementation, as their input is essential for policies to be effective, practical, and inclusive, benefiting teachers, students, and the education system as a whole.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Administrative Recommendations

- I. **Strengthening Collaboration:** To enhance the impact of teacher unions in educational policymaking, future recommendations may emphasize the need for even stronger collaboration between teacher unions, government agencies, education experts, and other stakeholders. Regular and structured consultations could be encouraged to ensure ongoing dialogue and cooperation throughout the policy formulation process.
- II. **Continuous Evaluation and Feedback:** To assess the effectiveness of teacher union involvement in policy formulation, future recommendations may suggest implementing systems for continuous evaluation and feedback. This evaluation process could help identify areas of improvement and further enhance the contributions of teacher unions in shaping educational policies.
- III. **Engaging Multiple Educational Levels:** The study's findings could lead to recommendations for engaging teacher unions representing different educational levels, including primary, secondary, and tertiary education. This multi-level involvement can ensure that policies cater to the diverse needs of students at various stages of their academic journey.

Future Research Recommendations

In future research on the involvement of teacher unions in the formulation of educational policies, the following considerations should be taken into account to address the identified limitations:

- I. **Increase Sample Diversity:** Future studies should aim to include a more diverse range of teacher unions, representing different educational levels, geographical locations, and institutional contexts. This could involve collaborating with national and regional teacher union organizations to access a broader and more representative sample.
- II. **Engage Multiple Stakeholders:** Expanding the scope of the study to include a wider range of education stakeholders, such as school administrators, policymakers, parents, and students, can provide a more comprehensive understanding of the dynamics between teacher unions and policymaking.
- III. **Triangulation of Data:** Employing multiple data collection methods, such as surveys, interviews, and focus groups, can enhance the richness of the data and provide a more nuanced perspective on teacher union involvement in policymaking.
- IV. **Longitudinal Studies:** Conducting longitudinal studies that extend beyond the initial time constraints can capture the evolving dynamics of teacher union involvement in educational policymaking. Long-term data collection can provide insights into the sustained impact of their contributions.
- V. **Mixed-Methods Approach:** Integrating qualitative and quantitative data through a mixed-methods approach can help identify universal themes while acknowledging context-specific variations.

By incorporating these considerations into future research, scholars can strengthen the validity and applicability of their findings, contributing to a more comprehensive and nuanced understanding of teacher unions' involvement in educational policymaking across different contexts

Limitations of the study

The study also encountered certain limitations that should be acknowledged to provide a comprehensive understanding of its implications:

- I. **Sample Size:** The study's findings were based on a limited sample of teacher unions and education stakeholders. Expanding the scope of the study to include a more diverse range of teacher unions and respondents could provide a broader perspective on the topic.
- II. **Time Constraints:** The study might have been conducted within a specific timeframe, potentially limiting the depth of analysis or the ability to capture evolving dynamics over time.
- III. **Generalizability:** As with any case study, the findings may be specific to the context of Zambia and may not be fully generalizable to other countries or regions.
- IV. **Access to Information:** The study's access to certain privileged information or policy-making processes could have been restricted, potentially influencing the comprehensiveness of the findings.

Despite these limitations, the study has undoubtedly highlighted the significant role of teacher unions in educational policy formulation in Zambia, particularly in the case of re-entry policies. By recognizing the contributions of teacher unions and addressing the identified



recommendations and limitations, education policymakers can create a more inclusive, effective, and student-centered policy-making process in the future.

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Competing Interests

Authors declare no competing interests.

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Author Contributions

Charity Kampamba conceived the idea and developed it fully, outlined the data analysis plan and provided technical analysis of the data. She provided all the resources for this study. Johnathan Halinga cleaned the data set, analysed the data and drafted the findings. Fidelis Muzyamba provided guidance from the outset of the idea to the finalization of the paper.

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