



IMPLICATIONS OF INVOLVING TEACHER UNIONS IN RE-ENTRY POLICY FORMULATION IN ZAMBIA

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ABSTRACT

In our literature review, it was evident that teacher unions, specifically Zambia National Union of Teachers (ZNUT) and Secondary School Teachers Union of Zambia (SESTUZ), played a role in the formulation of the re-entry policy in Zambia. However, the literature lacked clarity on the implications of involving teacher unions in this policy formulation process. To address this gap, our study aimed to explore and describe the implications of engaging teacher unions in the formulation of the Re-Entry Policy. Employing the dimensions of ontology, epistemology, and axiology, we utilized a qualitative case study design conducted in Zambia. The study population included 20 Teacher Union Representatives from ZNUT and SESTUZ and directors from the Ministry of General Education (MoGE). Following Creswell (1998) and Morse (1994) recommendations, we sampled 26 participants, conducting interviews with 11 union representatives and 4 directors until saturation was reached. Ethical clearance was obtained from the University of Zambia Directorate of Research and Graduate Studies. Our findings revealed positive implications of involving teacher unions in the Re-Entry Policy formulation. These included grounding the policy in the reality of the education system, fostering ownership and buy-in, ensuring inclusivity, promoting quality education, and providing support for implementation. However, negative implications were also reported, such as delays in decision-making, conflicts of interest, inflexibility, excessive demands, and a lack of diverse perspectives. The study emphasizes the crucial role of teacher unions in education policy formulation and implementation, asserting that their involvement is pivotal for policies to be effective, practical, and inclusive, ultimately 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

Societies, in the era of globalization, are consistently involved in reforming their education systems with the objectives of enhancing teaching and learning outcomes, improving the quality of education, ensuring equity in education, enhancing the internal efficiency and effectiveness of education systems, and bolstering global competitiveness (Rizvi *et al.*, 2005; Maassen and Cloete, 2006; Kamens and McNeely, 2010; Adamson, Astrand and Darling-Hammond, 2016a; Zajda, 2018, 2021). These reforms are designed to make education systems more pertinent and responsive to the prevailing challenges and the future needs of society. In the context of Zambia, following its independence in 1964, the Ministry of Education undertook significant educational reforms spanning management and administration restructuring, curriculum reform, the introduction of a new language policy, implementation of a novel examination and assessment system, and the establishment of a new basic education teacher diploma. These comprehensive reforms, spanning from 1965 to 1996, addressed various facets and levels of education (Barber, 1996; Adamson, Astrand and Darling-Hammond, 2016b; Habeenzu, 2016).

Recognizing the pivotal role of education in poverty reduction, international organizations such as the World Bank and UNICEF emphasize its significance in fostering sustained economic growth, paralleling a country's economic advancement with the overall education level of its economically active population. Education is further acknowledged as a transformative force by UNICEF, breaking generational cycles of poverty and disease while providing a foundation for sustainable development. In the Zambian context, the establishment of three teacher unions, namely Zambia National Union of Teachers (ZNUT), Secondary School Teachers Union of Zambia (SESTUZ), and Basic School Teachers Union of Zambia (BETUZ), along with formulated policies, aims to ensure the provision of education at expected standards, protect all stakeholders, and guarantee equity and equality in educational access between genders (Mutuku, 2015; Habeenzu, 2016; Kuja, 2022; Mazowa, 2022; Thelma, Phiri and Mutepuka, 2023).

One noteworthy policy in Zambia is the Re-entry policy, introduced on October 13, 1997, as a response to gender inequalities in national development and the imperative to narrow the gender gap in education. Existing literature suggests that the involvement of teacher unions in the policy formulation process holds potential benefits, including transparency, full stakeholder engagement, increased opportunities for improvement, potential policy balance, better understanding of education system realities, fewer legal and ethical concerns, increased ownership and support for the policy, ultimately contributing to a higher quality of education and student well-



being. Conversely, excluding teacher unions from policy formulation may lead to unintentional biases, policies disproportionately affecting certain groups, and potential resistance from teachers and stakeholders, diminishing effectiveness and legitimacy (Simuyaba, 2020a, 2020b; Muyunda, 2021; Kabika *et al.*, no date).

Given the significance of teacher unions in policy formulation, this study focuses on the implications of involving teacher unions in the formulation of the Re-entry Policy in Zambia. By elucidating their roles and contributions, the study seeks to deepen our understanding of the intricate dynamics between teacher unions and educational policymaking, aiming to foster inclusivity and equity in the educational system, particularly in supporting the reintegration of all students into learning environments.

SUMMARY LITERATURE REVIEW

Implications of involving teacher unions in Re-Entry Policy Formulation

James, (2003); Zheng and Liao, (2014) divide the positive effects of participation in advantages for the participants and advantages for the government, and advantages occurring during the decision-making process and ones that can emerge at the outcome stage. In addition, they list for each subdivision the disadvantages.

Positive Implications

The opportunity to educate is an advantage during the decision-making phase for both the participants and the government. The participants have the opportunity to persuade and enlighten the government and the government learns from and informs the participants (Pempel, 1974; Mentoer, 1995; Sakyi, 2000; Considine, 2005; Knill and Tosun, 2008; Cahn, 2012). In the outcome stage, for both the participants and the government, the opportunity to break gridlocks is an advantage. A participatory initiative can allow factions to compromise and find solutions to previously intractable problems (Barber, 1996; Adamson, Astrand and Darling-Hammond, 2016b; Sinkala, Simui and Muleya, 2022; Thelma, Phiri and Mutepuka, 2023). By opening the process to meaningful public input, the Government is empowered to make decisions it could never make unilaterally (Weiner, 2012; Simuyaba, 2016; Currin-McCulloch, 2019). Another expected positive effect for the participants is the possibility to gain some control over the policy process, which could lead to better policy and better implementation decisions (Kuja, 2022; Thelma, Phiri and Mutepuka, 2023). Better policy and policy implementation decisions are positive aspects for the government as well.

Negative Implications

A negative effect of participation of stakeholders in the policy process is, amongst others, that it can be very time consuming. 'Participation processes require heavy time commitments (Zheng and Liao, 2014). Besides the extra time a policy making process takes when, instead of having a single administrator take the decision, the content of the policy is discussed with participants, it would be very costly.

A disadvantage for the participants, in the outcome phase, is that opposing interest groups might participate too and influence the outcome towards their preferences. Or the government selects a particular group of stakeholders and excludes other groups. 'Governments can avoid the involvement of the more dissident voices' For the government, there are more disadvantages at the outcome phase: loss of decision-making control, the possibility to end up with a bad decision that is politically impossible to ignore and less budget for the implementation, when a substantial part of the budget was already used for the participation process (Hanekom and Bain, 1990; Mentoer, 1995; Majone, 1996; Sakyi, 2000; Stone, 2005).

The rationale for teachers' unions' championing the status quo and blocking reforms stems from their relative position of advantage in the current operation of school districts. To that end, teachers' unions in particular have a vested interest in working against reforms to maintain the status quo, and that they would exert "negative" leadership in opposition to particular reform strategies (Elliot, 1975; Krueger and Lindahl, 2001; Mutuku, 2015; Habeenzu, 2016; Kuja, 2022). Many of which may undermine member interests by adding additional performance pressures, threatening the loss of jobs or lending uncertainty to otherwise fixed workplace attributes like pay scales or transfer/layoff policies. Unions' opposition to change can not only inhibit reforms from their inception, but can also restrict the ability of administrators to respond to and ultimately implement initiatives that have become law (Sinkala, Simui and Muleya, 2022).

Interest Groups Theory

Interest Group Theory, also known as Pluralist Theory, is a political science theory that examines the role and influence of interest groups in the policy-making process. It was developed by Arthur Bentley in 1908 and further expanded upon by scholars like David Truman in the 1950s (Hanekom and Bain, 1990; Mentoer, 1995; Majone, 1996; Stone, 2005; McGann, 2007; Berry and Wilcox, 2018). In the context of this study, this theory was used to analyze the actions and influence of teacher unions, such as the Zambia National Union of Teachers (ZNUT) and the Secondary Schools Teachers' Union of Zambia (SESTUZ), as interest groups in the education



policy-making process. The theory helped elucidate how these teacher unions advocated for their members' interests and influence the development of educational policies, particularly the 1997 Re-Entry Policy in Zambia. By applying Interest Group Theory, we aimed to provide insights into the dynamics of teacher union involvement in policy formulation and implementation, shedding light on their strategies, challenges, and impacts in the context of educational policy-making in Zambia.

Methods

In this investigation, we adopted three fundamental dimensions of the research process: ontology, epistemology, and axiology, as outlined by . Employing a qualitative case study design, the research was conducted in Zambia, utilizing a conveniently sampled selection of schools, zones, districts, and provinces. The study population comprised 20 Teacher Union Representatives from Zambia National Union of Teachers (ZNUT) and Secondary School Teachers Union of Zambia (SESTUZ), along with directors from the Ministry of General Education (MoGE) Department. The determination of the sample size for the qualitative research adhered to the recommendations of both Creswell (1998) and Morse (1994). Following these recommendations, a sample of 26 participants was initially identified, but due to saturation, only 11 union representatives and 4 directors were eventually interviewed. Data collection involved the use of interview guides for all participants, and thematic analysis was employed for data analysis. Ensuring content validity, interview questions were designed based on an extensive literature review and the study's conceptual framework. Construct validity was fortified through the triangulation of data from diverse sources and methods. Ethical clearance for the study was obtained from 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 describe the implications of involving teacher unions 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
To describe implications of involving/not involving teacher unions in Re-Entry Policy formulation	➤ Implications of involving teacher unions in Re-Entry Policy formulation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Positive Implication <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensuring that the policy is grounded in the reality of the education system • Promoting ownership and buy-in • Ensuring that the policy is inclusive • Promoting quality education • Providing support for implementation - Negative Implication <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Delay in decision-making: • Conflicts of interest: • Inflexibility: • Excessive demands: • Lack of diverse perspectives

IMPLICATIONS OF INVOLVING TEACHER UNIONS IN RE-ENTRY POLICY FORMULATION

Positive Implications of Involving Teacher Unions in the Formulation Process of the Re-entry Policy

There are several positive implications of involving teacher unions in the formulation of the re-entry policy. Overall, involving teacher unions in the formulation of re-entry policies has had many positive implications, from promoting ownership and buying-in to ensuring that the policy is inclusive and supportive of quality education for all learners. most importantly, the objective of retaining the girl- child in school and the observed increasing number in the graduates owing to the policy and senses of belonging Review of policy and evaluation. Ensuring that the policy is grounded in the reality of the education system: Promoting ownership and buy-in: Ensuring that the policy is inclusive: Promoting quality education: Providing support for implementation: Unions are an integral part of the education system in the country and represent a critical component that is the Human resource which is key in matters of sensitization and implementation of any policy in education. Some policies impinge directly on teacher welfare which is the man area of concern for the Unions. Inclusiveness has been achieved there by promoting divergence views and idea Respondent. Teacher unions represent teachers who are key stakeholders in the implementation of educational policy hence their participation in formulation is key as they may advise on the suitability of the policy. The policy will represent the needs of the system. Respondents indicated that the positive implications include:



Ensuring that the policy is grounded in the reality of the education system

R4, R6, and R9, said that “...Teacher unions are often on the front lines of education, and they have first-hand knowledge of the challenges and opportunities in the education system. By involving teacher unions in the policy formulation process, policymakers can ensure that the policy is grounded in the reality of the education system and takes into account the needs of teachers and learners”.

Promoting ownership and buy-in

R1, R4, and R8 indicated that “...When teacher unions are involved in the policy formulation process, they are more likely to take ownership of the policy and to advocate for its successful implementation. This can help to promote buy-in from teachers, school administrators, and other stakeholders, which is crucial for the successful implementation of any policy”.

Ensuring that the policy is inclusive

“Teacher unions are often champions of inclusivity, and they can help to ensure that re-entry policies are inclusive of all learners who have dropped out of school, regardless of the reason. ...this can help to promote access to education and to address the underlying social and economic factors that may be contributing to girls dropping out of school” (**R6 and R9**).

Promoting quality education

R1 and R6 stated that “Teacher Unions are committed to promoting quality education, and they can help to ensure that re-entry policies are focused on improving the quality of education for all learners. This can help to ensure that girls who have dropped out of school are able to catch up on missed learning and to progress through the education system”.

Providing support for implementation

“Teacher unions can provide valuable support for the implementation of re-entry policies, including training for teachers and school administrators, monitoring and evaluation, and advocacy. This can help to ensure that the policy is implemented effectively and that it achieves its intended outcomes” (**R4**).

DC1 “The Union is a key stakeholder in the development of any Education policy formulation process. They always help in the dissemination of new knowledge and skills”. **DC 2** “Creation of the good relationship with the young mothers Owing the document Easy implementation”. **DC 3 and 4** “...Sense of belonging, owing the process, implementation review and monitoring Owing the policy Equal education given to the learners (equity)”.

Negative Implications of Involving Teacher Unions in Education Policy Formulation Process

In this study, it was established that while it is essential to involve teacher unions in the re-entry policy formulation and implementation process, it is crucial to balance their input with the needs and interests of students, parents, and the broader community. It is also very important to create a collaborative environment that fosters dialogue, mutual understanding, and compromise to develop policies that are in the best interests of all stakeholders. Respondents indicated that the involvement of teacher unions in the re-entry policy formulation and implementation resulted in; delay in decision-making, conflicts of interest, Inflexibility, Excessive demands, and lack of diverse perspectives

Delay in Decision-Making:

R1, R6, R8, and R11 said that “teacher unions may have a specific agenda, and their involvement in the policy formulation process could slow down the decision-making process, leading to delays in reopening schools or implementing necessary changes”.

Conflicts of Interest

“Teacher unions may advocate for policies that benefit their members' interests, which may not align with the interests of students or the broader community” (**R2 and R4**).

Inflexibility

“Teacher unions may resist changes to existing policies or practices, making it difficult to adapt to the changing needs of students, especially in response to emergency situations such as pandemics” (**R5 and R8**). **R10** said that “...it increases the bureaucracy, time consuming and costly during the consultation process”.



Excessive demands

“Teacher unions may make excessive demands that could be impractical or unaffordable, leading to resource constraints or an unreasonable burden on the school system” (R4, R7, and R8).

Lack of Diverse Perspectives

R3 and R9 stated that “...Teacher unions may represent the views of their members but may not necessarily represent the diverse perspectives of students, parents, or other stakeholders involved in the re-entry process”.

While some respondents indicated that there are some negatives that came with involvement of the teacher unions in the formulation and implementation of the re-entry policy, others indicated that there were no negatives whatsoever.

“... actually there are no negatives with the full involvement; Nothing /all positive; They prolong the process; I don't think there any because every formulation requires stakeholders and checks and balances” (R3, R7, R9 and R11).

DC 1 “There are no negative implication in the involvement of teacher Union in formulation process of education policy. The teacher unions are always helped” DC2 “Neglection of the policy Failure to appreciate the gap that is being bridged up”.

DC 3 “No negative implications”.

Implications of not Involving Teacher Unions in the Formulation Process of the Re-entry policy

It is generally beneficial to involve teacher unions in the decision-making process to ensure that re-entry policies are well-informed, practical, and responsive to the needs of teachers, students, and the educational system as a whole. Collaboration and dialogue with all stakeholders, including teacher unions, can lead to more effective and successful policy implementation. Lack of Representation: Missed Expertise: Decreased Collaboration: Potential Resistance and Conflict: Legal and Compliance Issues:

Lack of Representation

Teacher unions serve as representatives for teachers and educational professionals, advocating for their rights, working conditions, and professional development. Excluding them from the decision-making process means that the voices and perspectives of teachers may not be adequately considered. This can lead to policies that do not align with the needs and concerns of educators on the ground.

Missed Expertise

Teacher unions often have valuable expertise and insights regarding the educational system and the specific needs of teachers and students. They can provide valuable input on issues such as classroom management, curriculum development, and student well-being. By excluding teacher unions, policymakers may miss out on this expertise, leading to policies that are less effective or practical.

Decreased Collaboration

“Collaborative decision-making processes involving all stakeholders, including teacher unions, foster a sense of shared ownership and collaboration. When teachers feel included in the decision-making process, they are more likely to support and implement policies effectively. Excluding teacher unions can create a sense of disengagement and hinder the implementation of re-entry policies” (R4, 6,9, and 10).

Potential Resistance and Conflict

“Teacher unions play a crucial role in representing the interests of their members. If they are not involved in the development of re-entry policies, they may perceive it as a lack of respect for their profession and a disregard for their concerns. This can lead to resistance and conflict between teachers and policymakers, potentially impeding the smooth implementation of the policies” (R1, R6 and R10).

Legal and Compliance Issues

R7 and R10 stated that “...Teacher unions often negotiate contracts and agreements with educational authorities regarding working conditions, compensation, and other important aspects. By excluding them from the re-entry policy development, policymakers may overlook legal requirements and potential compliance issues, leading to conflicts or legal challenges down the line”.

“The implications of not involving teacher Union in Re-entry policy would have been very negative. If they were left out it could have made no positive studies it has made so far. Neglection of the policy itself as the great stake-holder is ignored with their



influency” (DC 2 and 4). DC 3 “...It would have been very negative to have it implemented. The policy cannot be followed to the later by management hence failure to claim out science and technology girls”.

DISCUSSION

The involvement of teacher unions in Re-Entry Policy formulation brings significant benefits. Their active participation promotes ownership, inclusivity, and quality education while providing necessary support for effective implementation. Teacher unions' expertise and representation of teachers enhance the policy's suitability, ensuring that it addresses the needs of the education system as a whole (Fataar, 2006; Bascia, 2005; Buhlungu, 1999; Draxler, 2008; Marope & Sack, 2007). Irvin and Stansbury (2004) divide the positive effects of participation in advantages for the participants and advantages for the government, and advantages occurring during the decision-making process and ones that can emerge at the outcome stage.

The involvement of teacher unions in the formulation of re-entry policies has yielded several positive implications. Their participation has promoted ownership and buy-in, ensuring that the policy is inclusive and supportive of quality education for all learners, with a particular focus on retaining girls in school. This has resulted in an observed increase in the number of graduates and a sense of belonging within the education system. By grounding the policy in the reality of the education system, teacher unions have contributed to its effectiveness (Simuyaba, 2020a; Muyunda, 2021; Kabika *et al.*, no date).

Teacher unions serve as an integral part of the education system, representing a critical human resource that is essential for sensitization and policy implementation in education. They advocate for teacher welfare, which is of paramount concern to the unions, as certain policies directly impact teachers. Inclusiveness has been achieved through the promotion of diverse views and ideas, ensuring that the policy reflects the needs of the entire system (Weiner, 2012; Simuyaba, 2016; Banda and Nowanga, 2017).

Teacher unions are recognized as key stakeholders in the implementation of educational policies, playing a crucial role in the formulation process (Fataar, 2006; Bascia, 2005; Buhlungu, 1999). Their expertise and advice are essential in assessing policy suitability and ensuring alignment with system requirements. The involvement of teacher unions has been shown to have positive implications, including promoting ownership and buy-in, ensuring inclusivity, promoting quality education, and providing support for implementation (Fataar, 2006).

Active participation of teacher unions in re-entry policy formulation brings numerous benefits. It contributes to a sense of ownership, inclusivity, and quality education while providing necessary support for effective implementation (Bascia, 2005; Vaillant, 2005). Teacher unions, as representatives of teachers and key stakeholders, enhance the policy's suitability and ensure that it addresses the needs of the education system as a whole (Marope & Sack, 2007). During the decision-making phase, the opportunity to educate is advantageous for both the participants and the government. Participants can persuade and enlighten the government, while the government can learn from and inform the participants (Irvin & Stansbury, 2004). In the outcome stage, involving teacher unions helps break gridlocks by allowing factions to compromise and find solutions to previously intractable problems (Irvin & Stansbury, 2004). By opening the process to meaningful public input, the government is empowered to make decisions that consider diverse perspectives and go beyond unilateral decision-making (Irvin & Stansbury, 2004). Furthermore, teacher union participation provides participants with the possibility to gain some control over the policy process, leading to better policy and implementation decisions (Irvin & Stansbury, 2004). This not only benefits the participants but also has positive implications for the government, as it promotes effective policy-making and implementation (Irvin & Stansbury, 2004).

However, the literature on teacher unions and educational policies presents divergent views. While some argue for the active participation of teacher unions in education policies (Bascia, 2005; Vaillant, 2005), others suggest that teacher unions are being marginalized and side-lined (Kallaway, 2007; Reimers & Reimers, 1996). Extreme viewpoints, such as those of Lieberman (2000) and Haar (1998), criticize teacher unions as destructive, self-centered, and not contributing significantly to educational policies, as they prioritize their own vested interests. Teacher unions' involvement in educational policies depends on the organizational strength of the unions and the professional capacities and expertise of their leaders and members (Fataar, 2006; Bascia, 2005; Buhlungu, 1999). Expertise within teacher unions is crucial for their effective engagement in educational policies and influencing their development (Draxler, 2008; Marope & Sack, 2007). While differing opinions exist, recognizing and fostering the expertise and perspectives of teacher unions can lead to more inclusive and effective educational policies that address the needs of the education system as a whole.

This study highlights the importance of involving teacher unions in the formulation and implementation of re-entry policies while also recognizing the need to balance their input with the interests of other stakeholders. It emphasizes the significance of creating a collaborative environment that promotes open dialogue, mutual understanding, and compromise in order to develop policies that serve



the best interests of all involved parties. Respondents in the study indicated that the involvement of teacher unions in the re-entry policy formulation and implementation process brought about certain challenges, including delays in decision-making, conflicts of interest, inflexibility, excessive demands, and a lack of diverse perspectives.

While the participation of teacher unions is crucial, it is essential to address these challenges to ensure the effectiveness and success of the re-entry policy. Delays in decision-making can hinder timely implementation, conflicts of interest need to be managed and resolved to maintain a fair and balanced approach, and inflexibility should be mitigated to allow for adaptability and responsiveness to changing needs and circumstances. Excessive demands must be carefully evaluated and balanced with available resources to ensure realistic and sustainable policy outcomes. Additionally, the lack of diverse perspectives should be addressed by actively seeking input from a wide range of stakeholders to create policies that are inclusive and comprehensive (McGann and Johnson, 2005; Mok, 2006; Steert, 2009; De Winter and Wolfs, 2017; Zajda, 2018).

The findings of the study underscore the need for a collaborative and inclusive approach to policy formulation and implementation, where the input of teacher unions is considered alongside the perspectives and interests of students, parents, and the broader community. By fostering constructive dialogue and finding common ground, it is possible to develop re-entry policies that effectively address the needs of all stakeholders and contribute to the successful reintegration of girls who have dropped out of school. The study revealed varying perspectives among respondents regarding the negatives associated with involving teacher unions in the formulation and implementation of the re-entry policy. While some respondents acknowledged certain negatives, others did not perceive any drawbacks. This disparity in viewpoints emphasizes the diverse nature of experiences and perceptions surrounding the involvement of teacher unions in policy processes. For those respondents who highlighted negatives, their concerns may have included potential challenges such as delays in decision-making, conflicts of interest, inflexibility, excessive demands, or a lack of diverse perspectives. These concerns may stem from specific instances or experiences related to the involvement of teacher unions in the re-entry policy formulation and implementation. It is important to address these concerns and find ways to mitigate any potential drawbacks in order to ensure the effectiveness and success of the policy.

Conversely, respondents who did not perceive any negatives might have had positive experiences or may have a strong belief in the benefits brought about by involving teacher unions. They might have observed effective collaboration, improved policy outcomes, and enhanced representation of teachers' perspectives through the involvement of teacher unions. Considering the divergent views expressed by the respondents, it is crucial to acknowledge that the impact of involving teacher unions in policy processes can vary depending on multiple factors, such as the context, stakeholders involved, and the specific dynamics of the union and education system. Balancing the benefits and potential challenges, and addressing any concerns that arise, can help foster a more inclusive and effective policy formulation and implementation process. Ultimately, understanding and considering the different perspectives surrounding the involvement of teacher unions in the re-entry policy formulation and implementation can contribute to a more comprehensive and nuanced understanding of the topic, leading to better-informed decision-making and policy development (Maassen and Cloete, 2006; Thornhill, 2012; Zajda, 2018).

The participation of stakeholders in the policy process can have negative effects, including being time-consuming and costly (Irvin & Stansbury, 2004; Lawrence & Deagen, 2001). Participation processes often require significant time commitments, and when policy content is discussed with participants instead of having a single administrator make decisions, it can prolong the policymaking process and increase costs (Irvin & Stansbury, 2004). During the outcome phase, there is a disadvantage for participants when opposing interest groups participate and influence the outcome according to their preferences. There is also the possibility of the government selecting specific stakeholders while excluding others, limiting diverse perspectives (Molenaers & Renard, 2009). For the government, disadvantages at the outcome phase include a loss of decision-making control, the potential for politically challenging decisions, and reduced budget allocation for implementation when a substantial portion of the budget was already used for the participation process (Irvin & Stansbury, 2004).

Regarding teachers' unions, MoE (2011, 2013, 2014) argues that unions have a vested interest in maintaining the status quo and may resist reforms that threaten their members' interests. This can hinder the initiation of reforms and restrict administrators' ability to implement initiatives (Cowen & Fowles, 2013). Despite these negative aspects, participation in the policy process offers advantages during the decision-making phase. Participants have the opportunity to educate and persuade the government, while the government can learn from and inform the participants, leading to more informed decision-making (Irvin & Stansbury, 2004). At the outcome stage, participation allows for breaking gridlocks and finding solutions to previously intractable problems. Opening the process to meaningful public input empowers the government to make decisions that consider a wider range of perspectives (Irvin & Stansbury, 2004).



Participants also have the chance to gain control over the policy process, leading to better policy and implementation decisions (Bratton, 1994).

Linking the Study Results to the Theory

The positive and negative implications of involving teacher unions in educational policymaking, as highlighted in the study results, can be linked to the Interest Group Theory. According to Interest Group Theory, interest groups, including teacher unions, play a crucial role in influencing public policy decisions to advance their members' interests (Hanekom and Bain, 1990; Mentoor, 1995; Majone, 1996; Stone, 2005; McGann, 2007; Berry and Wilcox, 2018). In the context of the positive implications, such as ensuring policy alignment with the reality of the education system, promoting ownership, and ensuring inclusivity, these align with the interest group's goal of advocating for policies that benefit their constituents (teachers) and the education system as a whole. The positive outcomes, including support for implementation and promotion of quality education, resonate with the interest group's desire for favorable policy outcomes that contribute to the well-being of their members. On the other hand, the negative implications, such as delays in decision-making, conflicts of interest, inflexibility, excessive demands, and a lack of diverse perspectives, also find resonance in the Interest Group Theory (Hanekom and Bain, 1990; Mentoor, 1995; Majone, 1996; Stone, 2005; McGann, 2007; Berry and Wilcox, 2018). Negative outcomes may arise when the interests of the group are in conflict with broader societal interests or when the group's influence results in policy outcomes that may not be in the best interest of all stakeholders. Delays, conflicts, and inflexibility may occur when the interests of the teacher unions are not aligned with other stakeholders, leading to challenges in reaching consensus and making timely decisions (Mentoor, 1995; Majone, 1996; Stone, 2005; McGann, 2007; Berry and Wilcox, 2018). The study results, showcasing both positive and negative implications of involving teacher unions, align with the dynamics predicted by the Interest Group Theory, where interest groups seek to shape policies to benefit their members but may encounter challenges when their interests' conflict with broader societal needs or the interests of other stakeholders.

Contribution to the Body of Knowledge

The study significantly contributes to the body of knowledge by shedding light on the multifaceted implications of involving teacher unions in educational policymaking. The findings offer valuable insights into both the positive and negative aspects of such involvement, enriching our understanding of the complexities surrounding the role of teacher unions in shaping education policies. One notable contribution lies in the identification of positive implications. The study illuminates how involving teacher unions positively impacts policy outcomes by ensuring that policies are grounded in the reality of the education system. This contribution underscores the importance of aligning policies with the practical needs and challenges faced by educators, ultimately enhancing the effectiveness and relevance of the implemented policies. Furthermore, the findings emphasize the positive effects of promoting ownership and buy-in, fostering a sense of commitment and responsibility among educators, which is essential for successful policy implementation.

The study also advances our comprehension of the positive implications related to inclusivity and the promotion of quality education. By involving teacher unions, policies become more inclusive and better tailored to address the diverse needs of students and educators. The emphasis on quality education aligns with broader educational goals, emphasizing the importance of policies that contribute to improved learning outcomes and overall educational excellence. On the flip side, the study makes a significant contribution by uncovering the negative implications of involving teacher unions. Delays in decision-making, conflicts of interest, inflexibility, excessive demands, and a lack of diverse perspectives are highlighted as potential drawbacks. This insight contributes to a more nuanced understanding of the challenges that may arise when interest groups, in this case, teacher unions, exert influence on policymaking. These findings provide policymakers, educators, and researchers with valuable information to anticipate and address potential pitfalls associated with involving teacher unions in the formulation and implementation of educational policies. In essence, the study's comprehensive exploration of both positive and negative implications enhances the existing body of knowledge, providing a nuanced understanding of the dynamics involved in the collaboration between teacher unions and educational policymaking. This nuanced understanding is crucial for developing more informed, equitable, and effective education policies that benefit all stakeholders in the educational ecosystem.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, this study provides a comprehensive examination of the implications associated with involving teacher unions in the educational policymaking process. The findings underscore both positive and negative dimensions of such involvement, contributing valuable insights to the broader discourse on the collaboration between interest groups and policy formulation. On the positive front, the study illuminates the crucial role of teacher unions in ensuring that education policies are firmly grounded in the reality of the education system. This grounding enhances the practicality and relevance of policies, aligning them with the actual needs and challenges faced by educators in their day-to-day responsibilities. Additionally, the study highlights the positive impact of involving teacher unions



in promoting ownership and buy-in among educators, fostering a sense of commitment and shared responsibility for successful policy implementation.

The study's emphasis on inclusivity and the promotion of quality education as positive implications of teacher union involvement underscores the importance of policies that address the diverse needs of students and educators. The recognition of these positive outcomes aligns with broader educational goals, emphasizing the need for policies that contribute to improved learning outcomes and overall educational excellence. However, the study also brings attention to the negative implications associated with teacher union involvement. Delays in decision-making, conflicts of interest, inflexibility, excessive demands, and a lack of diverse perspectives emerge as potential challenges. These negative dimensions emphasize the importance of carefully navigating the collaborative process between teacher unions and policymakers to mitigate potential drawbacks.

In light of these findings, it is evident that involving teacher unions in the policymaking process is a nuanced endeavor with both merits and challenges. Policymakers and education stakeholders must be mindful of these implications when engaging with teacher unions to ensure a balanced and effective policymaking process. The study's nuanced exploration of the dynamics involved in such collaborations serves as a valuable resource for policymakers, educators, and researchers seeking to enhance the inclusivity, relevance, and effectiveness of education policies. Ultimately, this study contributes to a deeper understanding of the complexities inherent in the intersection of interest group dynamics and educational policymaking.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Administrative Recommendations

- I. **Strengthen Collaboration Platforms:** Enhance collaboration between teacher unions, government agencies, and education experts. This collaboration ensures policies are grounded in the reality of the education system, fostering ownership, inclusivity, and quality education.
- II. **Formalize Union Representation:** Consider formalizing teacher union representation in policymaking bodies. This ensures inclusivity, promotes buy-in, and supports the effective implementation of policies.
- III. **Implement Continuous Evaluation:** Establish systems for continuous evaluation of teacher union involvement. This ensures ongoing dialogue, identifies areas for improvement, and supports effective policy implementation.

Future Research Recommendations

- I. **Diverse Sample Representation:** Future research should include a diverse range of teacher unions to ensure a comprehensive understanding of their positive and negative implications on policy outcomes.
- II. **Longitudinal Studies:** Conduct longitudinal studies to capture the evolving dynamics of teacher union involvement. This provides insights into sustained positive implications and the mitigation of negative consequences over time.
- III. **Mixed-Methods Research Design:** Integrate qualitative and quantitative methods in future research to explore the nuances of teacher union involvement, capturing both positive and negative implications comprehensively.

Limitations of the Study

- I. **Sample Size Constraint:** Acknowledge that the study's findings were based on a limited sample, impacting the depth of understanding of both positive and negative implications.
- II. **Time Constraints Impact:** Recognize that the study might have been conducted within a specific timeframe, limiting the exploration of sustained positive implications and the resolution of negative consequences over time.
- III. **Context-Specific Generalizability:** Understand that the findings may be specific to the context of Zambia. The positive and negative implications may vary in other educational settings.
- IV. **Access to Information Constraints:** Acknowledge that limited access to privileged information or policy-making processes could have influenced the comprehensiveness of the understanding of both positive and negative implications.

About the Authors

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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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