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From protectorate to republic: Tracing the evolution of education policy in Zambia (1890-2025)

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Abstract

Tracing the intricate path of Zambia's educational policy from 1890 to 2025, this article offers a longitudinal examination of how a nation's learning landscape has been continuously reshaped. Beginning with the rudimentary, racially segregated provisions of the British Protectorate, the study transitions to the ambitious, expansive policies of the post-independence Republic. Through an in-depth review of historical documents and government policy papers, this research identifies key paradigm shifts, such as the move towards universal primary education and localized curricula, alongside persistent challenges including funding shortfalls, quality assurance, and equitable access. It underscores how global influences, economic pressures, and domestic political changes have profoundly impacted policy formulation and implementation, providing critical insights into the complex interplay between education, governance, and national development over a century and a quarter.

Keywords: Education policy, colonial education, post-independence, educational reform, Zambia

Introduction

The profound impact of education on societal development, economic growth, and the cultivation of national identity is universally acknowledged (Idrisa *et al.*, 2012^[15]; UNESCO & African Union Commission, 2023)^[40]. For nations emerging from colonial rule, the education system often becomes a critical battleground for asserting self-determination and reshaping societal values (Bereketeab, 2011)^[1]. In the African context, particularly, educational policy has served not merely as a technical framework for schooling but as a powerful instrument reflecting and driving broader political, ideological, and socio-economic transformations (Kallaway, 2018; Sanda *et al.*, 2025)^[17, 36]. Zambia, a nation whose journey from British Protectorate to independent Republic spans over a century, offers a compelling case study in this intricate relationship.

Despite a growing body of scholarship on various aspects of Zambian education history, there remains a notable gap in comprehensive, longitudinal analyses that systematically trace the evolution of its education policy from its colonial inception through to the contemporary period (Kelly, 1991; Carmody, 2004)^[19, 4]. Existing works often focus on specific eras or thematic areas, leaving an opportunity to provide a holistic understanding of how policy has adapted, persisted, and transformed across distinct political epochs.

This article, therefore, aims to provide a comprehensive historical analysis of education policy evolution in Zambia, meticulously tracing its trajectory from the late colonial period, marked by the establishment of the British Protectorate in 1890, to the present day and near future in 2025. Specifically, the objectives of this study are threefold: first, to identify and characterize the distinct phases of education policy development under both colonial and independent rule; second, to analyze the key political, economic, and social drivers that have shaped these policy shifts and continuities; and third, to critically assess the overarching impacts and implications of this policy evolution on Zambia's national development.

This article argues that Zambian education policy has undergone successive phases of significant adaptation, driven by dynamic interplay between evolving political ideologies (from colonial control to nationalist aspirations), prevailing economic conditions (from resource scarcity to structural adjustment and globalization), and shifting societal demands (Sanda *et al.*, 2025)^[36]. While exhibiting some enduring foundational principles, the journey

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from Protectorate to Republic has necessitated radical departures in both the philosophical underpinnings and practical implementation of education, often reflecting a complex negotiation between inherited structures and the pursuit of national vision (Bereketeab, 2011; UNESCO & African Union Commission, 2023) ^[1, 40].

To achieve this, the article is structured chronologically. Following this introduction, a brief section outlines the conceptual framework guiding the analysis and details the methodology employed. Subsequent sections will systematically explore education policy during the Protectorate Era (1890-1964), followed by an examination of the Post-Independence Republic Era, broadly divided into phases of initial expansion (1964-c. 1990) and the period of liberalization and global influence (c. 1990-2025). The article concludes with a comprehensive discussion synthesizing key findings, identifying overarching themes, and reflecting on the broader implications of Zambia's unique educational journey.

2. Conceptual Framework/Theoretical Lens

To systematically analyze the complex evolution of education policy in Zambia across distinct political epochs, this study is primarily guided by a post-colonial theoretical framework, complemented by insights from the broader field of education policy analysis.

Post-colonial theory offers a critical lens through which to examine the enduring legacies of colonialism on the educational structures, curricula, and philosophies of newly independent nations. It recognizes that independence does not automatically erase the intellectual and institutional imprints of colonial rule. Instead, the post-colonial period often involves a complex process of negotiation, adaptation, and sometimes rupture, as nations strive to decolonize knowledge, assert indigenous identities, and redirect educational systems towards national development priorities (Fanon, 1961; Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, 1986) ^[10, 31]. For Zambia, this framework allows for a nuanced exploration of how colonial education, initially designed to serve imperial interests (e.g., producing clerical labor, fostering obedience), either resisted or gave way to nationalist aspirations for universal access, skills development, and cultural relevance. It enables an investigation into both the overt policy shifts and the more subtle continuities in educational thought and practice from the Protectorate to the Republic.

In conjunction with this, principles from education policy analysis will be employed to dissect the specific mechanisms and drivers of policy change. This involves examining the stages of policy development (formulation, implementation, evaluation), identifying key actors and stakeholders (e.g., colonial administrators, nationalist leaders, international donors, local communities), and understanding the interplay of various influencing factors such as economic conditions, political ideologies, and global educational trends (Ball, 1990; Dale, 1989) ^[2, 6]. This approach helps to unpack *how* and *why* particular policies were adopted, revised, or abandoned at different points in Zambia's history.

By integrating these theoretical perspectives, this study moves beyond a mere chronological description of events. It seeks to critically interpret the historical data, understanding education policy not as a neutral or static entity, but as a dynamic construct shaped by power relations, ideological

struggles, and the ongoing project of nation-building in a post-colonial African context. This dual lens provides a robust analytical tool for dissecting the transitions, adaptations, and persistent challenges within Zambia's educational landscape from 1890 to 2025.

3. Methodology

This article employs a qualitative, historical research design to systematically trace and analyze the evolution of education policy in Zambia from 1890 to 2025 (Ross, 2015; Maxwell, 2013) ^[35, 25]. This approach is particularly suited for understanding complex social phenomena over time, providing rich, in-depth insights into the intricate interplay of political, economic, and social forces that have shaped educational trajectories (Creswell & Poth, 2018) ^[5].

Data Collection

- A. Archival Records:** Official government documents from both the British colonial administration (Northern Rhodesia) and the Zambian Republic - including departmental reports, policy papers, legislative acts, and ministerial speeches - sourced from the National Archives of Zambia and The National Archives (UK) (Hill, 1993; National Archives of Zambia, 2020) ^[14, 30].
- B. Policy Documents and White Papers:** Key statements and strategic frameworks issued by the Zambian Ministry of Education, such as the Education Reform Strategic Framework 2019-2023 (Ministry of Education of Zambia, 2019) ^[28].
- C. Legislative Instruments:** Education Acts, statutory instruments, and regulations governing schooling from 1890 to 2025 (Education Act, 1966; Education Act, 2011) ^[7, 8].
- D. Academic Literature:** Scholarly monographs, journal articles, theses, and dissertations offering secondary analyses of Zambian education history and policy (Carmody, 2004; Kelly, 1991) ^[4, 19].
- E. International Reports:** Publications by UNESCO, UNICEF, the World Bank, and the International Monetary Fund on their influence during Zambia's structural adjustment and broader development initiatives (UNESCO, 2023; World Bank, 2020; IMF, 2021; UNICEF, 2022) ^[40, 16].

In line with the aforementioned, it can be stated that, the 1890-2025 timeframe necessitates a multi-faceted sourcing strategy to ensure what Scott (1990) perceives as both period coverage and depth in examining pivotal policy shifts.

Data Analysis

- **Chronological Mapping:** Organizing documents by era (Protectorate, early Republic, later Republic) to construct a clear timeline of policy milestones (Ragin, 1987) ^[33].
- **Content and Discourse Analysis:** Examining policy texts to extract stated objectives, underlying philosophies, target populations, and implementation strategies, while analyzing the discourse for power dynamics and shifts in official narratives (Krippendorff, 2013; Fairclough, 1992) ^[23, 9].
- **Thematic Categorization:** Identifying recurring and evolving themes - such as access and equity, curriculum content, financing mechanisms, quality assurance,

teacher training, and external influences - across different historical phases (Braun & Clarke, 2006) ^[3].

- Comparative Analysis: Juxtaposing policies from successive eras to highlight continuities and discontinuities, especially in the transition from colonial to independent frameworks (Ragin, 1987) ^[33].
- Contextualization: Situating policy changes within their broader historical, political, economic, and social contexts, linking decisions to national and international events and trends (Strauss & Corbin, 1998) ^[39].

Limitations

While aiming for comprehensive coverage, this methodology faces challenges in accessing some early colonial records and internal government deliberations (Hill, 1993) ^[14]. Additionally, reliance on documented sources foregrounds stated policy over its on-the-ground implementation or lived stakeholder experiences (Maxwell, 2013) ^[25], which would require ethnographic or oral history methods beyond this study's scope.

4. The Protectorate Era: Foundations and Limitations (c. 1890s - 1964)

This section of the article details the educational landscape in Zambia (then Northern Rhodesia) from the establishment of the British Protectorate until just before independence. It focuses on the aims, structures, and limitations of education under colonial rule.

The inception of formal education in what would become Zambia was inextricably linked to the arrival of Christian missionaries in the late 19th century, preceding and then operating alongside the British colonial administration. This initial period, from the establishment of the British Protectorate in the 1890s until national independence in 1964, laid foundational, albeit profoundly limited and racially stratified, educational structures (Hambulo, 2016) ^[12].

4.1 Early Missionary Education (1890s - Early 1900s)

Prior to direct colonial government involvement, various missionary societies, including the London Missionary Society, Paris Evangelical Missionary Society, and later the Catholic White Fathers, established rudimentary schools across Northern Rhodesia. Their primary objective was evangelization, with literacy serving as a tool for biblical instruction. Education was basic, focusing on reading, writing, arithmetic, and religious instruction, often integrated with rudimentary vocational skills like carpentry or agriculture (Snelson, 1974; Carmody, 2004) ^[38, 4]. These schools, though limited in reach and scope, represented the very first formal learning opportunities for the indigenous population, laying a scattered groundwork that the nascent colonial state would later seek to regulate.

4.2 Colonial Administration and Policy Development (Early 1900s - 1940s)

With the formalization of British colonial rule, particularly after the British South Africa Company ceded administrative control to the Colonial Office in 1924, a more structured, though still parsimonious, approach to education policy emerged. The Phelps-Stokes Commissions of the 1920s significantly influenced British colonial education policy across Africa, advocating for "adaptation" - an

education system tailored to the perceived needs of African communities, often emphasizing practical and vocational training over academic pursuits (King, 1971; O'Brien, 2006) ^[22, 32]. In Northern Rhodesia, this translated into policies designed to produce semi-skilled laborers, clerks, and low-level administrators necessary for the colonial economy and civil service, primarily serving the mining sector that grew rapidly in the Copperbelt.

Legislation such as the Native Education Ordinance of 1927 marked the colonial government's increasing, albeit minimal, financial and supervisory role. Education remained largely in the hands of missions, which received meagre grants-in-aid from the government. Policy was characterized by racial segregation, with vastly superior educational provisions for European children, mirroring the broader social and economic stratification of the protectorate. African education was deliberately limited, ensuring a compliant workforce and preventing the rise of an educated African elite that might challenge colonial authority (Mwanakatwe, 1968; Carmody, 2004) ^[29, 4]. Access to secondary education for Africans was virtually non-existent for much of this period, and university education was an unattainable dream within the Protectorate itself.

4.3 Post-WWII and Nationalist Stirrings (1940s - 1964)

The post-World War II era brought significant shifts, fueled by the return of African soldiers exposed to a wider world, the growth of urban centres, and the burgeoning of nationalist movements across Africa. There was a palpable surge in demand for more and better education from the African population, increasingly viewed as a pathway to economic advancement and political empowerment (O'Brien, 2006) ^[32].

Despite these growing pressures, colonial policy remained largely conservative. While some reforms were introduced, aiming for slight expansion and improved quality in African primary education, the fundamental limitations persisted. The colonial government, alongside the Federal government (of Rhodesia and Nyasaland, 1953-1963), struggled to balance limited resources with increasing African demands, often prioritizing European education and security over substantial investment in African schooling (Rotberg, 1967) ^[34]. The late colonial period saw the establishment of a few more secondary schools for Africans, but these remained woefully inadequate to meet demand. The discriminatory structure of education became a key grievance for nationalist leaders, who saw it as a deliberate tool to perpetuate African subjugation (Hambulo, 2016; Carmody, 2004) ^[12, 4]. The very limited access to higher education meant that many future leaders had to seek opportunities abroad, highlighting the profound deficit in human capital development inherited by the independent nation.

Keeping the aforementioned in view, it can be stated that, the Protectorate era established an educational system that was: primarily missionary-led, severely underfunded by the state for Africans, deeply segregated along racial lines, and deliberately limited in scope to serve colonial economic and political interests rather than the holistic development of the indigenous population. This legacy would profoundly shape the challenges and aspirations of the independent Zambian government.

5. The Republic Era: Independence, Expansion, and Ideological Shifts (1964 - c. 1990)

In this section, the article delves into the profound changes and challenges faced by Zambia's education system immediately following independence in 1964, extending through the period of initial expansion and the onset of significant economic difficulties.

The attainment of independence on October 24, 1964, marked a radical shift in Zambia's political and ideological landscape, profoundly transforming the objectives and delivery of education. The newly formed Republic inherited an education system that was severely underdeveloped for the majority African population, racially segregated, and largely designed to serve colonial interests (Mwanakatwe, 1968) ^[29]. The post-independence government, under President Kenneth Kaunda and the United National Independence Party (UNIP), immediately embarked on ambitious reforms aimed at rectifying these historical imbalances and aligning education with the aspirations of a sovereign nation.

5.1 Education for All and National Unity (1964 - 1970s)

The immediate post-independence period was characterized by a fervent commitment to universalizing access to education and leveraging it as a cornerstone for national unity and human resource development. The rallying cry became "education for all." Policy goals focused on rapid expansion at all levels, particularly primary education, to ensure every Zambian child had access to schooling (Mwanakatwe, 1968) ^[29]. This was coupled with significant investment in secondary and tertiary education, crucial for producing the skilled workforce and professionals needed for Zambianisation - the process of replacing expatriates with qualified Zambians in key sectors of the economy and civil service (UNIP, 1967).

A pivotal ideological shift was the adoption of Zambian Humanism, a state philosophy articulated by President Kaunda, which emphasized communalism, self-reliance, and people-centered development. In education, this translated into efforts to Zambianise the curriculum, making it more relevant to local contexts, history, and culture, moving away from the Eurocentric colonial model. There was a strong emphasis on practical subjects and productive work within schools, aiming to foster an ethic of self-sufficiency. The establishment of the University of Zambia (UNZA) in 1966 was a landmark achievement, symbolizing the nation's commitment to developing its own intellectual capacity (Kelly, 1991) ^[19]. Despite remarkable expansion rates, particularly in primary enrollment, challenges quickly emerged, including maintaining quality amidst rapid growth, teacher shortages, inadequate infrastructure, and a persistent urban-rural divide in access and resources.

5.2 Economic Challenges and Structural Adjustment (1980s - early 1990s)

The optimism and expansion of the 1960s and 1970s faced severe headwinds in the 1980s as Zambia experienced a dramatic decline in copper prices, its primary export. The resultant economic crisis, exacerbated by global recessions and inefficient state-led enterprises, placed immense pressure on public finances (Kelly, 1991) ^[19]. Education, as a significant expenditure, was hit hard. This period saw the increasing influence of international financial institutions (IFIs) like the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the

World Bank, which advocated for Structural Adjustment Programmes (SAPs) (World Bank, 1986) ^[42].

The implementation of SAPs led to a shift in education policy away from the state-centric, free-for-all model. Austerity measures included reduced government spending on social services, leading to the reintroduction of user fees (often termed "parental contributions"), cuts in subsidies, and a freeze on teacher recruitment. These policies had detrimental effects on access and equity, particularly for children from impoverished backgrounds, contributing to increased dropout rates and declining quality (Lungwangwa, 1992) ^[24]. The focus shifted from unbridled expansion to efficiency, cost-recovery, and a greater emphasis on vocational training linked to market needs, sometimes at the expense of general academic education. Debates around privatization of education and the role of private schools also gained traction during this period, marking a significant departure from the socialist-inspired policies of early independence. This era was characterized by a struggle to maintain the gains made in the earlier period while grappling with severe resource constraints and externally imposed policy conditionalities.

6. The New Millennium: Liberalization, Globalization, and Reform Initiatives (c. 1990 - 2025)

This section of the article covers the period from the early 1990s, marked by significant political and economic liberalization, through to the year 2025 and extending slightly into the future. It specifically highlights the impact of global trends, new policy initiatives, and ongoing challenges.

The dawn of the 1990s ushered in a new political and economic landscape for Zambia, transitioning from a one-party state to a multi-party democracy and embracing market liberalization (Kelly, 1999) ^[21]. This paradigm shift profoundly influenced education policy, moving away from the state-dominated model of the past towards greater decentralization, private sector involvement, and alignment with global educational agendas.

6.1 Multi-Party Democracy, Decentralization, and Partnerships (1990s - early 2000s)

With the advent of multi-party democracy in 1991, education policy became increasingly influenced by the principles of economic liberalization and good governance. While the structural adjustment programmes of the previous decade had initiated reforms, the 1990s saw a more deliberate push towards decentralization of educational management, granting more autonomy to provinces, districts, and even individual schools (Ministry of Education, 1996) ^[26]. The aim was to foster greater accountability, efficiency, and responsiveness to local needs. This period also saw an increased emphasis on partnerships, encouraging greater involvement of local communities, parents, and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in the provision and oversight of education. Private schools, previously marginalized, began to gain more prominence, reflecting a diversified educational landscape. Despite these policy shifts, the legacy of underfunding from the SAP era continued to pose significant challenges, affecting infrastructure, learning materials, and teacher welfare.

6.2 Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) Era (2000s - 2025)

From the early 2000s, Zambian education policy became increasingly intertwined with international development frameworks, particularly the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) (2000-2015) and subsequently the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) (2015-2030). The MDG push for Universal Primary Education (MDG 2) led to renewed efforts to abolish tuition fees, increase enrollment, and improve retention rates, often supported by significant donor funding and sector-wide approaches. Policies like the Free Primary Education Policy (introduced in phases) aimed to remove financial barriers to schooling, demonstrating a renewed commitment to access after the austerity of the SAP years (GRZ, 2002).

The transition to the SDGs, particularly SDG 4: Quality Education, broadened the policy focus from mere access to a more holistic understanding of learning outcomes, equity, and lifelong learning. Current policy initiatives, such as the *Education and Skills Sector Plan* (Ministry of Education, 2017) ^[27] and recent government pronouncements, reflect these global aspirations alongside national priorities. Key areas of focus include:

- **Curriculum Reform:** Modernizing curricula to foster 21st-century skills, critical thinking, and vocational competencies.
- **Teacher Development:** Investing in pre-service and in-service training, and improving teacher welfare to enhance quality.
- **Information and Communication Technology (ICT) Integration:** Promoting the use of technology in learning and administration.
- **Inclusive Education:** Expanding provisions for children with special needs and ensuring equitable access for all marginalized groups.
- **Early Childhood Education (ECE):** Acknowledging the foundational importance of ECE and expanding its provision.
- **Free Education Policy:** The current administration's renewed commitment to providing *free education* from Early Childhood to Secondary level, aiming to alleviate financial burdens on families and ensure equitable access, signaling a significant policy shift that seeks to reverse earlier cost-sharing models (H.E. President Hakainde Hichilema, 2021) ^[13].

As of 2025, Zambian education policy continues to navigate a complex landscape of persistent challenges - including funding gaps, infrastructure deficits, high pupil-teacher ratios, and urban-rural disparities - while simultaneously striving to meet ambitious national development targets and global commitments. The ongoing emphasis on quality, skills development, and genuinely free access represents a critical juncture, attempting to consolidate past gains and build a more resilient and equitable system for the future.

7. Discussion and Analysis

In this section, the article synthesizes the historical narrative on Zambia's education policies over the years, draws notable connections, and presents its core arguments based on the evidence presented in the preceding sections. In addition, here the article answers the "so what?" question

and ties back to the introduction and theoretical framework provided earlier in this discourse.

The historical trajectory of Zambia's education policy, from the Protectorate's rudimentary provisions to the Republic's modern aspirations, reveals a dynamic interplay between internal socio-political forces and external influences. This longitudinal analysis underscores several overarching themes, highlighting both profound transformations and persistent challenges that characterize the nation's evolving learning landscape.

7.1 Key Themes and Patterns

Across the more than a century examined, several recurrent themes emerge as central to Zambian education policy. The fundamental tension between access and quality has been a constant. While the post-independence era saw an unprecedented drive for mass enrollment, often at the primary level, this expansion frequently strained resources, leading to concerns about the standard of education delivered. Conversely, periods of austerity or external conditionalities sometimes prioritized efficiency or market relevance, inadvertently compromising equitable access. The role of external actors - from early missionaries and colonial administrators to international financial institutions and global development bodies - has been consistently profound, shaping policy directions and resource allocation, often necessitating a delicate balance between national sovereignty and external influence. Furthermore, the persistent debate regarding the purpose of education - whether it should primarily serve economic development (e.g., vocational skills), foster national unity and citizenship, or promote individual intellectual growth - has continued to resurface in various policy documents and reforms across the decades.

7.2 Continuities and Discontinuities in Policy

Despite the dramatic political transition from Protectorate to Republic, certain continuities in educational thinking and structure are discernible. The foundational role of primary education as the bedrock of the system, albeit with vastly different ideological underpinnings, has remained constant. Similarly, the challenges of resource mobilization and equitable distribution between urban and rural areas have persisted, albeit evolving in scale and nature. The *idea* of education as a tool for societal transformation, though interpreted differently, has also remained a central tenet.

However, the discontinuities are equally striking and represent genuine paradigm shifts. The most significant rupture was the post-independence commitment to universal, non-racial education and the deliberate Zambianisation of the curriculum, a direct ideological reversal of colonial policies designed for segregation and subservience. The shift from education as a tool for colonial subjugation to an instrument for national liberation and development is a profound discontinuity. More recently, the move towards decentralization, private sector involvement, and free education under the New Dawn government represents a further departure from earlier centralized, state-controlled models and the cost-sharing measures of the structural adjustment period.

7.3 Drivers of Change

The evolution of Zambian education policy has been driven by a confluence of powerful forces:

- **Political Ideology:** The shift from imperial control to nationalist and humanist ideals, and later to multi-party democracy and market liberalization, directly dictated educational priorities and philosophical underpinnings.
- **Economic Conditions:** Fluctuations in copper prices, the oil shocks of the 1970s, structural adjustment programmes, and global economic integration have consistently imposed constraints or created opportunities for educational investment and reform.
- **Societal Demands:** Popular pressure for increased access to education, especially from the nationalist era onwards, has been a potent force, often compelling policy makers to respond to the aspirations of the populace.
- **International Mandates and Global Trends:** The influence of organizations like the World Bank, IMF, UNESCO, and the global adoption of frameworks such as the MDGs and SDGs have increasingly shaped national policy formulation, particularly regarding access, quality, and inclusion.

7.4 Impact and Outcomes

The cumulative impact of these policy shifts on Zambian society has been profound. Education has undeniably been central to fostering national cohesion post-independence, expanding literacy rates, and producing human capital crucial for the country's development. The establishment of universities and colleges transformed the intellectual landscape, creating a local intelligentsia previously denied under colonial rule. However, the uneven implementation of policies, particularly during periods of economic hardship, has also perpetuated disparities, contributing to lingering challenges in educational quality, relevance, and equitable access for all. The ongoing policy emphasis on free education and skills development represents the current effort to mitigate these historical challenges and harness education more effectively for inclusive national progress.

8. Conclusion

As a closure, the article provides a summary of the study findings, reiterating its main argument, and highlighting the significance of the research. It also offers recommendations and suggests avenues for future research.

Keeping the aforementioned in view, it can be stated that this article has systematically traced the intricate evolution of education policy in Zambia, from its nascent and limited structures under the British Protectorate in 1890 to the ambitious and globally influenced reforms of the Republic in 2025. Through a historical analysis, guided by a post-colonial theoretical framework and principles of policy analysis, it has illuminated how Zambia's educational landscape has been continuously reshaped by a complex interplay of political ideology, economic imperatives, and societal demands.

Our investigation has revealed three distinct, yet interconnected, phases: the Protectorate Era, characterized by missionary-led, racially segregated education, and state-underfunded education primarily serving colonial interests; the early Republic Era, marked by a revolutionary commitment to universal access, national unity, and Zombination, often driven by the philosophy of Humanism; and the New Millennium Era, which has seen shifts towards liberalization, decentralization, and a strong alignment with international development goals, notably the MDGs and

SDGs, culminating in renewed commitments to free and quality education.

The central argument of this article is that Zambian education policy, while exhibiting some enduring continuities in its fundamental purpose, has undergone successive, profound adaptations. The journey from colonial subjugation to national self-determination necessitated radical departures in both the philosophical underpinnings and practical implementation of education. However, this progress has not been linear, frequently challenged by economic crises, resource constraints, and the complex negotiation of external influences with domestic aspirations. The significance of this study lies in providing a comprehensive, longitudinal understanding of an African nation's enduring struggle to build an equitable and effective education system responsive to its own needs. It underscores how education is not merely a technical apparatus but a vital arena where national identity is forged, economic futures are shaped, and social justice is pursued. Understanding this historical continuum is critical for policy makers seeking to address contemporary challenges and for scholars examining the long-term impacts of colonial legacies and post-colonial reforms.

Recommendations

Based on this historical analysis, it is recommended that future policy formulation in Zambia prioritizes:

1. **Sustainable Domestic Financing:** Reducing over-reliance on external funding for core educational provision to ensure resilience against global economic fluctuations and external conditionalities.
2. **Bridging the Quality Gap:** Targeted interventions to ensure that expanded access is consistently matched by improvements in instructional quality, teacher development, and adequate learning resources, particularly in rural and underserved areas.
3. **Contextualized Curriculum Development:** Continuous review of the curriculum to ensure it remains relevant to Zambia's unique developmental needs, cultural heritage, and the evolving demands of the 21st-century labor market, effectively balancing academic rigor with vocational skills.

Future Research

This study opens several avenues for further inquiry. Future research could delve deeper into the localized impacts of specific policy changes, exploring the experiences of diverse communities and schools. A comparative study of Zambia's educational policy evolution with that of other Southern African nations, particularly those with similar colonial histories, could also yield valuable insights into shared challenges and divergent approaches. Furthermore, detailed analyses of the efficacy of current "free education" policies and their long-term economic and social returns would be highly beneficial.

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