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ASSESSING THE FACTORS INFLUENCING THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE
FREE EDUCATION POLICY IN BUGESERA DISTRICT, RWANDA

BY

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A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULLFILMENT OF THE
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Abstract

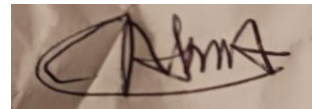
The study focused on assessing the factors influencing the implementation of the free education policy, either for its success or failure in Bugesera District, Rwanda. Therefore, this study evaluated factors affecting the implementation of free education with a particular focus on the Bugesera District, both daily and boarding schools. However, in order to engage the research questions and address them, the study adopted both quantitative and qualitative research approaches, where mixed methods were used, to design the study. The purpose of sampling was used as a way to find samples from the particular participants of the study. Interviews, questionnaires, and document analysis were used as tools to collect data, and mixed methods were employed to analyze the data gathered. Therefore, the study found that there are different actors involved in the implementation of free education, such as parents, the district, district education officers, and local authorities. Some of them are not fully participating in the implementation of the free education policy as a result of various factors. The study also found that while many legal and regulatory frameworks and strategies govern the implementation of free education policy, there are several factors that affect this implementation, which cannot be blamed on these frameworks. It was also found that some factors affect the successful implementation of free education, such as government limited funds/ low budget particular for education, socio-economic, financial resources, socio-culture and geographical and the lack of Public-Private Partnership and NGOs, low income of parents which is not allowed them to afford the associated school costs and necessities as well as the lack of schools infrastructures which is limiting schools to accommodate and enroll more students. Therefore, to address these challenges and limitations that slow down the success of the implementation of free education in Bugesera District. Therefore, the study recommended that the government, especially the district education office, should engage the public-private partnership to get funds to sponsor the schools. Furthermore, the study recommended that the local authorities should educate the parents about free education and bring awareness to them so that they can play their part in implementing and successful the free education. The study also recommends that the government should set mechanisms and strategies to increase education.

Key Words: Education, Free Education, Policy, Bugesera District

Declaration

I declare that this dissertation is my original work except where sources have been cited and acknowledged. The work has never been or will it ever be submitted to another university for the award of a degree.

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Dedication

This research is dedicated to all the Bugesera District children who walk miles to attend school and the parents who struggle to afford school and school essential materials but still try by all means to send their children to school.

List of Acronyms and Abbreviations

NGOs	Non-Governmental Organizations
UN	United Nations
GPE:	Global Partnership for Education
EFA:	Education For All
ESD:	Education for Sustainable Development
UNICEF	United Nations International Children’s Emergency Fund
WHO	World Health Organization
SDG:	Sustainable Development Goal
LIFE:	Free Basic Education
PA:	Parent-Teacher Association
CESA:	Continental Education Strategy for Education
NGO	Non-Governmental Organizations
OECD	Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific & Cultural Organization

Definition of Key Terms

Education is the process through which individuals acquire knowledge, skills, values, attitudes, and competencies through formal, informal, and non-formal learning experiences. It is both a social and personal process that prepares individuals for participation in society and contributes to human development (UNESCO. Education Transforms Lives. Paris: UNESCO, 2017)

Free education refers to an education system in which the government or public institutions cover the cost of tuition, making schooling accessible to all individuals regardless of their financial background. It is often implemented at primary and secondary levels, and in some countries extends to higher education (World Bank. World Development Report 2018: Learning to Realize Education's Promise. Washington, DC: World Bank, 2018.)

Policy: A policy is a deliberate system of principles, rules, and guidelines established by governments, organizations, or institutions to guide decisions and actions, and achieve specific goals (Thomas R. Dye. Understanding Public Policy. 15th ed. Boston: Pearson, 2017)

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CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

The term "free" in this context refers to the elimination of all school fees, a concept often associated with more developed welfare states such as the education system in the UK (Habyarimana, 2022). However, it is important to acknowledge that Rwanda is one of the world's poorest countries, and thus the implementation and outcomes of this policy differ from those in more developed nations. This study delves into the method of implementation, the policy's effectiveness, and its long-term implications (Ke, 2022). The chapter focused on the background, the statement of the problem, the purpose of the study, the objectives, research questions, assumptions, the significance of the study, delimitation, and limitations.

1.2 Background to the Study

The term "free education" often sparks significant debate about its true meaning and implications. Generally, free education refers to the provision of educational services without direct charges to students or their families (Miller, 2018). However, this concept is frequently contested due to the financial mechanisms that support such systems. Critics argue that what is called "free education" is more accurately described as "state-funded education," where the government covers the costs through taxation or other revenue-generating means (Smith, 2020). This distinction raises questions about the sustainability of these policies and whether they genuinely provide equitable access to education. Moreover, the definition of free education can vary significantly across different contexts. For instance, some countries may offer free primary and secondary

education but charge tuition for higher education, leading to a fragmented understanding of what constitutes “free” (Johnson & Lee, 2019). The controversy also extends to discussions about quality versus accessibility; while education may be free at the point of delivery, concerns about resource allocation and educational outcomes persist (Brown & Green, 2021).

The importance of free education cannot be overstated. It serves as a fundamental human right and a critical driver of social equity and economic development (UNESCO, 2015). By removing financial barriers to access, free education promotes inclusivity and enables individuals from diverse backgrounds to pursue academic opportunities that would otherwise be unattainable (Baker & Smith, 2017). Furthermore, an educated populace positively contributes to society by fostering civic engagement and reducing poverty rates (Davis & Thompson, 2018). Free education also plays a pivotal role in enhancing national productivity. A well-educated workforce is essential for innovation and competitiveness in a globalized economy (Friedman & Rosenman, 2020). Thus, investing in free education benefits individuals and strengthens societal structures as a whole.

By 1999, the government had established an education policy to provide 9 years of basic education to all and improve access, equity, quality, and efficiency in education to foster development (Theogene, 2022). While this policy achieved some success, many families still struggled to afford to send their children to school due to the economic situation. Consequently, it was determined that eliminating school fees would be the most effective approach to increase attendance and literacy (MINEDUC, 2012). The initiative was part of the government’s efforts to rebuild the education system after the devastating effects of the 1994 genocide (Madani, 2019). Rwanda government has tried to improve

and develop the education sector over the past years, through providing education to the Rwandan. 98 percent of children are enrolled in primary school, 79.96 percent at high school level, and 41 percent at tertiary level (MINEDUC, 2015).

However, due to limited resources, governments, particularly in low and middle-income countries, and growing need and demand for higher education government found themselves unable to fully provide and finance higher education (Chaudhry &Uboweja, 2014). In order to satisfy the need and demand for higher education, governments involve the private sector in the provision and financing of higher education (UNESCO 2014). However, there is still a high number of children who are not in high school or college and are failing to access high school and college (HEC, 2021).

French has been Rwanda's primary medium of instruction (MOI) since Belgian colonial administration. However, in alignment with developing education and implementing the education policy in October 2008, a decision passed by the Rwandan Cabinet mandated that English be taught in all public schools, from primary to tertiary, starting immediately. Francophone Rwanda launched a bold education agenda in 2008 to further its development objectives (Pearson, 2014). The administration claimed that joining the Anglophone Commonwealth of Nations and East African Community, as well as switching from French to English, was essential for regional and international business and trade (Samuelson, 2012). The Rwandan government prioritizes teaching children the language that will prepare them for the workforce once they graduate from school. This will ensure that their education aligns with the goals set forth for the growth of the nation (Rwanda News Authority, 2010). President Kagame draws a connection between language, education, and development, stating that clear language policies are necessary for good language policy delivery and effective education in order for development to

continue. English was made the primary language of instruction in Rwandan schools and government agencies by a constitutional amendment enacted in October 2008 (Lewin, 2011). Then, the government has invested in teaching, teachers, and building schools and colleges, but Rwandan are not using those opportunities and benefiting from them. This has delayed the development of economic growth in Rwanda and inadequate capacitated and skilled labour at markets (UNESCO, 2018). Therefore, due to those challenges this study aims to fill this knowledge gap by assessing the effectiveness of public policy in education in Rwanda the research topic aims to investigate the effectiveness and implications of free education for all policy in Rwanda Education and addressing public policy challenges in education within developing countries, with a specific focus on Rwanda, through evaluating how policy is implemented in the education sector in Rwanda, understanding their impact on addressing key policy challenges, and assessing the overall effectiveness of that policy in improving educational outcomes in the country, The concept of free education entails government-funded schooling where tuition fees, materials, and teacher salaries are covered, relying on public taxes or charitable contributions (Ng'ang'a, 2012). Initiatives for universal basic education gained momentum from the 1990 Jomtien World Conference and were reaffirmed in subsequent global forums. Countries in Southeast Asia and Africa adopted free education policies, leading to increased enrolment but also revealing challenges like inadequate infrastructure and teacher shortages (Bentaouet, 2006). In Kenya and Tanzania, the abolition of school fees significantly boosted enrolment rates, though quality suffered due to resource constraints (UNESCO, 2007). Similarly, Uganda's late implementation of free education faced issues of overcrowding and declining

educational quality (UNESCO, 2014). Overall, while free education policies expanded access, they often fell short in ensuring high-quality learning outcomes.

1.3 Statement of the Problem

The Rwandan government introduced and ratified the free education policy for all Rwandans in January 2003. The policy aimed to increase student enrollment to 100% (MINEDUC, 2003). In align of achieving it, according to UNESCO (2018), the government has invested in education for constructing school buildings, increasing teachers, and other resources. Government spending on education has also risen, from 11.9% of the national budget in 2008 to 14.8% in 2010, and further to 19.9% in 2019 (MINECOFIN, 2020). According to the MINEDUC (2021) report, 1,638 secondary schools were constructed, and six public colleges were built (CAVM, CASS, CBE, CE, CMHS, and CST), and teachers increased from 36,000 in 2003 to 74,000 in 2020. Despite the Rwanda government's effort has put in the education sector through investment, there is still a high rate of Rwandans who are not at school, 43% are enrolled in school, and 57 % are not enrolled at school, and only 23% in Bugesera district are enrolled (HEC, 2021). It is still hard for children in rural areas to access and attend school. Despite free tuition fees, parents still struggle to afford essential school materials, and this has increased the dropout rate. Therefore, this has slowed down the development of education in the Bugesera District. Rwanda is now facing a deficiency of skilled employees at market and workplace, which slows the development of the economy, innovation, and industrialization in the country. This research aims to explore the factors that affect the implementation of the free education policy in the Bugesera district in Rwanda.

1.4 Research Objectives

- To assess the extent to which the free education policy has been implemented in Bugesera District.
- To evaluate whether the implementation of the free education policy in Bugesera District was successful.
- To examine factors that may lead to success or failure in the implementation of the free education policy in Bugesera District.
- To recommend strategies that may lead to the successful implementation of the free education policy in Bugesera District.

1.5 Research Questions

The following are the research questions that will be addressed by the study:

- How was the free education policy implemented in Bugesera District?
- To what extent was the implementation of the free education policy in Bugesera District successful?
- What factors led to the success or failure in the implementation of the free education policy in Bugesera District?
- What are the recommended strategies that may lead to the successful implementation of the free education policy in Bugesera District?

1.6 Assumptions

The study was based and grounded on the assumption that the implementation of the free education policy in Bugesera District was not successful due to the socio-economic, social, and cultural factors, and a lack of financial resources. Another assumption was

that the government put more effort into implementing the Free Education policy, but implementation of free education policy in Bugesera District failed due to imbalance in the allocation of funds, high corruption, and less accountability. Another assumption was that the study participants have more skills, knowledge, and information about policy, and they are going to provide more information and honesty about the Free Education Policy implementation in Bugesera District.

1.7 Significance of the Study

This study was conducted in order to assess the factors that influenced the effectiveness of the free education policy for all Rwandans in Bugesera district in the Eastern Province of Rwanda. Research gave insight into challenges faced by the government to implement the free education policy in Bugesera, which hindered the success of policy implementation and its effectiveness. Different stakeholders of the free education policy participated in the research; therefore, research informed their parts and responsibilities in the implementation and success of the Full Education Policy.

However, the research was valuable for parents, students, and teachers who participated in the research by providing them with clear information regarding their contributions toward free education policy implementation. The study also addressed a social concern and aims to raise public awareness about the state of free education in Bugesera District. The study also benefited anyone interested in understanding the importance of free education policy in the area. The findings of this study aimed to inspire school administrators in Bugesera District by presenting innovative methods for mobilizing human, physical, and financial resources to support the policy

1.8 Delimitations of the Study

Geographic Scope, one delimitation could be the geographic scope of the study, specifically focused on the Bugesera District of Rwanda. The findings and conclusions drawn from this research were not generalizable to other regions or districts within Rwanda. Therefore, Bugesera District was chosen because of its experience of a high rate of people who are not getting into high school and tertiary education.

1.9 Limitations of the Study

A researcher was full time candidate student who was on vacation with limited time, but all efforts were made to make sure data was collected. I used my conduct to facilitate my study so that distance did not become a limitation. The Google form and link with the questions and questionnaire were created, shared, and distributed to the participants via email and phone. Another limitation was to access the important information and statistics as the implementation of policy engaged the money that the headteachers were to full shared all information. I assured the school's administration that information would not be disclosed to anyone against them by using coding to keep information.

Conducting the research required some significant resources, including funding for data collection, access to key stakeholders for interviews or surveys, and other logistical support. All necessary effort and action were taken to fund and support my study so that the resources would not become a limitation to the study. I used my serving funds, and there was zero cost to study participants.

CHAPTER 2 REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

2.1 Introduction

This chapter discusses what research has been done in the area of education policy implementation, its levels of free education policy success or failure, and the factors that caused it. It engaged others' views from different scholars and free education policy research studies. In addition, it focuses on the theoretical framework, the conceptual framework, as well as the description of main themes, particularly in the field, and available information is discussed throughout this section.

2.2 Theoretical Framework Theory

2.2.1 Systems Theory

The study adopted Systems Theory, it developed by Ludwig von Bertalanffy (1968), provides a comprehensive framework for understanding complex phenomena by examining the relationships and interactions among various components within a whole system. Rather than analysing individual elements in isolation, Systems Theory emphasizes the interdependence, interconnectedness, and dynamic interactions among system components. It is widely applied in public policy, organizational studies, and education to analyse how different factors interact to influence outcomes.

At its core, a system is defined as a set of interrelated and interdependent components that work together toward a common goal (Bertalanffy, 1968). These components may include individuals, institutions, processes, and resources. Systems Theory is based on the premise that the behaviour of a system cannot be fully understood by examining its individual parts separately; instead, it must be understood as a whole (Skyttner, 2005).

According to Systems Theory, the effectiveness of a system depends not only on the performance of individual components but also on the quality of interactions between them (Bertalanffy, 1968). Therefore, the implementation of the free education policy in Bugesera cannot be explained by a single factor, such as funding or infrastructure alone, but rather by how these factors interact within the system.

A key concept in Systems Theory is the input–process–output model. Inputs refer to the resources, materials, or information entering the system. Processes (or throughput) involve the transformation of inputs into outputs through various activities and interactions. Outputs are the results or outcomes produced by the system. Additionally, feedback mechanisms allow systems to adjust and improve performance over time (Meadows, 2008).

In the context of public policy, Systems Theory views policy implementation as a dynamic and continuous process involving multiple actors and institutions. Policies are not implemented in isolation but are influenced by political, economic, social, and cultural environments. These environmental factors interact with institutional structures and human behaviour, shaping policy outcomes (Easton, 1965). Another important feature of Systems Theory is openness. Open systems interact continuously with their external environment, receiving inputs and producing outputs that affect and are affected by external conditions. For example, an education system interacts with the economy, culture, and political structures of a society. Changes in any of these external factors can influence how the education system functions (Bertalanffy, 1968). Systems Theory also highlights the concept of interdependence, where all components of a system rely on one another. For instance, administrators and policymakers are all interconnected. A failure

or weakness in one component, such as inadequate funding or poor infrastructure, can negatively affect the entire system (Senge, 2006).

Another key principle is equifinality, which suggests that a system can achieve the same outcome through different pathways or processes. In policy implementation, this means that different strategies or approaches can lead to similar results, depending on context and available resources (Katz & Kahn, 1978). This concept is particularly important in developing countries, where varying local conditions require flexible and adaptive policy approaches. Furthermore, Systems Theory emphasizes feedback loops, which are essential for learning and adaptation. Feedback allows policymakers and institutions to evaluate the effectiveness of policies and make necessary adjustments. Positive feedback reinforces successful practices, while negative feedback identifies areas needing improvement (Meadows, 2008).

In addition, Systems Theory incorporates the idea of homeostasis, or system stability. Systems strive to maintain balance and stability despite external changes. However, when disruptions occur such as economic crises or resource shortages the system may become unstable, affecting its performance and outcomes (Skyttner, 2005). In the education sector, Systems Theory is particularly relevant because education systems are inherently complex and involve multiple stakeholders and processes. These include curriculum development, teacher training, infrastructure provision, policy implementation, and community involvement. All these elements interact to influence educational policy outcomes such as access, quality, and equity (UNESCO, 2015). Therefore, Systems Theory provides a holistic and integrative framework for analysing how different factors interact within an education system. It allows researchers to

identify not only individual challenges but also the relationships and interactions that contribute to policy success or failure.

2.3 Relevance of Systems Theory to the Study

Systems Theory is highly relevant to this study as it provides a comprehensive framework for analysing the implementation of the free education policy in Bugesera District, Rwanda. The policy operates within a complex system involving multiple actors (parents, Government, Teachers, students), resources, and environmental factors that interact to influence its effectiveness. First, the implementation of free education can be understood through the input–process–output model. Inputs in this context include government funding, educational infrastructure, teaching staff, learning materials, and policy guidelines. These inputs are essential resources required for the successful implementation of the policy. However, the availability and adequacy of these inputs significantly influence the outcomes of the policy.

The process component involves how these inputs are utilized within the education system. This includes policy execution by government institutions, school management practices, teacher performance, and stakeholder participation. Inefficiencies or weaknesses in these processes such as poor coordination, lack of accountability, or inadequate training can hinder effective implementation. The outputs of the system include increased school enrolment, improved access to education, reduced dropout rates, and enhanced educational quality. However, the study highlights that despite the policy, challenges such as low enrolment in Bugesera District persist, indicating inefficiencies within the system.

Second, Systems Theory emphasizes interdependence among system components, which is evident in the implementation of free education policy. The success of the policy depends on the collaboration between various stakeholders, including government authorities, school administrators, teachers, parents, and the community. For example, even if the government provides free tuition, parents still play a crucial role in supporting their children by providing school materials and ensuring attendance. A lack of parental involvement or financial capacity can negatively affect policy outcomes. Third, the theory highlights the importance of the external environment. The implementation of free education in Bugesera District is influenced by socio-economic, cultural, political, and geographical factors. For instance, poverty limits parents' ability to afford indirect education costs such as uniforms and transportation. Cultural beliefs may also influence attitudes toward education, particularly for girls. Additionally, geographical barriers, such as long distances to schools, affect access and attendance. These environmental factors interact with the education system and shape its effectiveness.

2.4 Literature Review

2.4.1 Conceptualization of Free Education Policy

The term "free education" refers to the policy of eliminating both direct and indirect costs associated with schooling, such as school fees and uniform fees. Typically, school fees are compulsory charges imposed by the government or educational institutions responsible for providing educational opportunities. These fees may cover basic educational needs or other expenses like boarding, meals, supplies, or transportation. In many developing countries, school fees are imposed on children due to insufficient

funding and limited resources, resulting in a significant disparity in access to education based on economic means (Mberimana, 2018). Local, provincial, and national authorities rarely offer subsidies for educational programs, infrastructure, and necessities, further exacerbating this inequality. The elimination of school fees enables all children to have equal opportunities to attend schools, and this concept is commonly referred to as free education.

Education is widely recognized as a critical factor in the economic, political, and social development of any nation. It plays a significant role in addressing poverty and empowering individuals to actively contribute to the growth of society. Turkkahraman (2012) argues that education not only imparts knowledge but also shapes individuals' personalities, enabling them to adapt to evolving social and economic conditions. Therefore, it is the responsibility of society to enhance the abilities and skills of its people to keep pace with the rapid changes occurring in the world today. Unfortunately, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) has observed that school fees pose a significant barrier for millions of children in low-income countries, particularly in Africa, preventing them from accessing and completing primary and secondary education (UNESCO, 2007).

The right to education encompasses both access to education and the receipt of a high-quality education (UNICEF, 2000). The concept of quality education can vary (Unterhalter, 2019), but in Rwanda, it is defined as ensuring that all children leave school equipped with the necessary skills, knowledge, attitudes, and values for Rwanda's economic and social development, as well as their own personal growth (World Bank, 2011, p. 90). To achieve this, the Ministry of Education (MINEDUC) in Rwanda has established quality standards for primary, secondary, and higher education institutions.

These standards align with the key dimensions of quality education outlined by UNICEF (2000), which include quality learners, quality learning environments, quality content, quality processes, and quality outcomes. This study adopts this understanding of quality education. In line to provide accessible, equitable, and effective education at all levels (MINEDUC, 2013), Rwanda's education sector has made significant investments in expanding access to basic education from nine to twelve years (MINEDUC, 2014a). Growth and development are significantly influenced by education. People can earn a respectable life only with the information, skills, and equal chances that education offers (World Bank, 2011). According to the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), every nation is attempting to accomplish the development goals and modernize the educational system.

Education can be defined as the process of acquiring knowledge, skills, values, beliefs, and habits through various forms of learning, such as schooling, training, research, or practical experience. Another definition of education is that it is a lifelong process of learning that enables individuals to develop their intellectual, social, emotional, and physical capacities to their fullest potential. Education can also be thought of as a means of socialization that helps individuals acquire the norms, values, and cultural practices of their society and become active and responsible citizens (Carter, 2022).

Education is the transmission of knowledge, skills, and character traits through various formal, non-formal, and informal means. It involves structured learning within institutions like schools and encompasses levels such as early childhood education, primary education, secondary education, and tertiary education (UNICEF, 2020). Education can be teacher-centred or student-centred and cover subjects like science, language, and physical education. It aims to socialize individuals into society by

instilling cultural values, fostering critical thinking, and equipping them with the necessary skills to contribute meaningfully to their communities. In primitive cultures, education focused on guiding children to become productive members of their tribes or bands through enculturation. As societies evolved, formal education emerged to pass on knowledge efficiently across generations. The development of writing systems in ancient civilizations facilitated this transition from informal to formal education. Over time, educational practices expanded to include a wider population beyond elites and religious groups. The printing press's invention in the 15th century further democratized access to knowledge by increasing literacy

2.4.2 United Nations Actions towards Education Policy

The United Nations (UN) has been actively involved in promoting education policies and initiatives worldwide. Here are some notable examples of successful interventions where the UN has assisted countries in improving their education systems. Education for All (EFA) Initiative, the UN launched the Education for All initiative in 2000, aiming to provide quality education for all children, youth, and adults (UNESCO, 2014). By coordinating efforts with governments and other stakeholders, the initiative has made significant progress in increasing access to education, reducing illiteracy rates, and improving the quality of education in many countries.

According to the World Health Organization (2021) and the Global Partnership for Education (GPE), a multilateral partnership, the GPE works to strengthen education systems in developing countries. It provides financial resources, technical assistance, and policy advice to help countries improve access to education, enhance learning quality, and promote equity. The GPE has assisted numerous countries in achieving

notable successes in education, including increased enrolment rates, improved infrastructure, and enhanced learning outcomes. UNESCO's Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) - UNESCO, a specialized agency of the UN, has been instrumental in promoting education for sustainable development. Through ESD, countries are encouraged to integrate sustainable development principles into their education policies and practices. This approach helps learners develop the knowledge, skills, and attitudes needed to address global challenges such as climate change, poverty, and social inequality (UNESCO, 2021). According to the United Nations Educational, (2021), the UN has been a strong advocate for girls' education, recognizing the importance of gender equality in education. The UN Girls' Education Initiative (UNGEI) supports national efforts to ensure that all girls have access to quality education. This includes addressing barriers to girls' education, such as discrimination, gender-based violence, early marriage, and cultural biases. With UN support, several countries have made significant progress in reducing gender disparities in education and increasing girls' enrolment rates.

Post-Conflict Education. In countries affected by conflict, the UN has played a crucial role in rebuilding education systems and ensuring access to education for children and youth. For example, the UN Peacebuilding Fund has supported education initiatives in post-conflict countries like Liberia, Sierra Leone, and South Sudan. These efforts have helped restore educational infrastructure, train teachers, provide learning materials, and reintegrate child soldiers into formal education (UNICEF, 2008).

It's important to note that the UN's role is often supportive and collaborative, working in partnership with governments, civil society organizations, and other stakeholders. While the UN provides resources, expertise, and guidance, the success of education policies

ultimately depends on the commitment and actions of individual countries (Hoosain, 2020).

Sustainable Development Goal 4, the United Nations' 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, includes a specific goal dedicated to education, known as Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG 4). SDG 4 aims to ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all. It sets targets such as universal primary and secondary education, eliminating gender disparities in education, and ensuring access to quality early childhood development, vocational training, and higher education (Hoosain, 2020). The UN recognizes the critical importance of education in emergencies, where conflicts, natural disasters, and humanitarian crises disrupt schooling. The UN's Education Cannot Wait fund was established to address this issue. It provides rapid and flexible funding to support education programs in emergency contexts, ensuring that children and young people affected by crises have access to uninterrupted education and psychosocial support (Paul, 2020). The United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) publishes the Global Education Monitoring Report annually. The report assesses global progress in education and provides evidence-based recommendations for policymakers. It serves as a valuable tool for countries to monitor their education systems, identify challenges, and implement effective policies (UNESCO, 2018).

The UN recognizes the crucial role of teachers in delivering quality education. Through partnerships with governments and organizations, it supports initiatives to enhance teacher training and professional development. For example, the UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning offers training programs for educators, focusing on innovative teaching methods, inclusive education, and lifelong learning approaches.

The UN promotes South-South cooperation, where countries share knowledge, experiences, and resources to support educational development. This approach encourages collaboration among countries facing similar challenges and allows for the exchange of successful education policies and practices. The UN facilitates such cooperation through platforms like the South-South Cooperation in Education initiative and promotes regional networks for knowledge sharing (Hoosain, 2020).

The UN supports literacy programs globally, recognizing the importance of literacy as a foundational skill for individuals and societies. UNESCO's Literacy Initiative for Empowerment (LIFE) provides technical assistance to countries, helping them develop effective literacy policies, programs, and assessment tools. The UN also celebrates International Literacy Day on September 8 each year to raise awareness about literacy issues and mobilize support for literacy initiatives (World Health Organization, 2021). According to Paul (2020), the UN promotes inclusive education, which aims to provide quality education to all learners, regardless of their backgrounds, abilities, or circumstances. Inclusive education recognizes and addresses barriers that prevent certain groups from accessing education, such as children with disabilities, marginalized populations, and refugees. The UN supports countries in developing inclusive education policies, training teachers, adapting curricula, and creating supportive learning environments.

McCowan (2021) mentioned that the UN provides technical assistance and capacity-building support to countries to strengthen their education systems. This includes assisting governments in developing and implementing education policies, improving data collection and monitoring systems, enhancing curriculum development, and strengthening teacher training programs. Such support helps countries build their own

expertise and capabilities to sustain positive changes in education. The UN engages in advocacy and awareness-raising efforts to promote the importance of education. It highlights education as a fundamental human right and a key driver of sustainable development (Paul, 2020). Through campaigns, events, and partnerships, the UN raises awareness about the challenges and opportunities in education, mobilizes public support, and encourages governments to prioritize education in their policies and budgets. The UN supports and collaborates with various global education initiatives and partnerships to advance education goals. For example, the Education Cannot Wait fund, mentioned earlier, is a partnership between the UN, governments, civil society, and the private sector to provide education in emergencies. Additionally, the UN works closely with organizations like the Global Partnership for Education (GPE), Education Above All (EAA), and the Variety Foundation to strengthen education systems, expand access to quality education, and improve learning outcomes (United Nations Educational, 2021).

According to Chankseliani (2021), the UN undertakes research and data analysis to inform evidence-based education policies and programs. It conducts studies, collects data, and produces reports on various educational topics, ranging from learning outcomes and school infrastructure to gender disparities and education financing. This research helps identify trends, challenges, and effective strategies for educational development, supporting countries in making informed decisions and implementing evidence-based policies. The UN plays a crucial role in mobilizing financial resources for education. It advocates for increased domestic and international investment in education, emphasizing the importance of allocating sufficient funds to support inclusive and quality education systems. The UN also supports countries in developing effective financing mechanisms, such as education sector plans and budgetary reforms, to ensure

that education receives adequate resources (McCowan, 2021). The UN has supported Rwanda in its efforts to improve its education system following the devastating genocide in 1994. Through partnerships with organizations like UNESCO and UNICEF, Rwanda has made significant progress in increasing school enrolment rates, improving teacher training, and enhancing the quality of education. As a result, Rwanda has seen a remarkable increase in primary school completion rates and a reduction in gender disparities in education (UNESCO, 2018).

In Pakistan, the UN has worked closely with the government to address challenges in the education sector, particularly focusing on increasing access to education for girls and marginalized communities. Through initiatives such as the Girls' Education Initiative, Pakistan has made strides in reducing gender disparities in education and improving overall literacy rates (Ramakrishna, 2020). The UN has also played a crucial role in supporting Brazil's efforts to enhance its education system, Chankseliani (2021). By collaborating with agencies like UNESCO, Brazil has implemented programs to improve teacher training, curriculum development, and educational infrastructure. These efforts have led to increased school enrolment rates, reduced dropout rates, and improved learning outcomes for students across the country.

2.5 Overview of Global Free Education Policies

The concept of free education refers to a form of public education in which the government covers all tuition fees, provides teaching and learning materials, and pays teachers (Ng'ang'a, 2012). Instead of relying on tuition fees, free education is funded through public taxes or charitable organizations. The 1990 Jomtien World Conference on Education for All (EFA) established the achievement of universal basic education as

a top priority. During this conference, participating nations pledged to provide compulsory and free primary education for all children and reduce adult illiteracy (UNESCO, 2007). This pledge was made in response to low primary school enrolment rates and the belief that low education levels would hinder development. The right to free education is recognized in Article 26 of the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which states that everyone has the right to education. Education shall be free, at least in the elementary and fundamental stages. This declaration sparked a global commitment to basic education, particularly in Africa. The commitment to free education was reaffirmed in 2000 at the World Education Forum in Dakar, Senegal, and at the United Nations Millennium Summit, where 189 countries promised to ensure universal basic education by 2015 (Bentaouet, 2006). The strategy adopted to fulfil this mandate was the abolition of school fees, which led to significant changes in enrolment rates. Initially, the Millennium Development Goal of universal basic education focused on ensuring that all children enter primary school, complete the full cycle, and acquire basic skills. However, it was found that household income and the cost of schooling were major barriers to enrolment. Thus, the abolition of tuition fees aimed to remove these cost challenges and increase access to education.

According to a report by UNESCO (2014), several countries in Southeast Asia, including China, India, Indonesia, Japan, Malaysia, the Philippines, Korea, Thailand, and Vietnam, have ratified the Convention on the Rights of the Child. This commitment requires these countries to provide free and compulsory education to all children at the primary and lower secondary levels. In Malaysia and Japan, upper secondary education is also provided free of charge, although it is not mandatory. Consequently, the number of students at the primary and lower secondary levels increased by 38% between 2008

and 2010. This increase has also led to a need for more schools and classrooms, with a 36% increase in the number of schools and an 18% increase in the number of classrooms. Additionally, teacher training, textbook revisions, and improvements to school facilities were necessary. Government spending on education has also risen, from 11.9% of the national budget in 2008 to 14.8% in 2010, and further to 19.9% in 2016.

The experience of implementing free education in Asian countries revealed challenges and confusion during the reform period. It was crucial to mitigate any negative effects on student learning. Effective preparation was necessary before introducing new structures into the existing educational system. However, policymakers struggled to align education plans with public financial plans and budgeting processes. As a result, the reforms and efforts to sustain education produced only limited results, as Southeast Asian countries were unable to secure sufficient public resources for education (UNESCO, 2014). In Mexico, the 1993 General Education Law gives the states complete responsibility for administering free and compulsory education. There is no tuition at primary and junior high schools, but families are required to provide uniforms, school supplies, transportation, and occasionally textbooks (Santibanez, Vernez & Razquin, 2005). The removal of tuition fees led to a rapid increase in enrolment at the primary and secondary levels. To accommodate the higher enrolment rates, double-shift primary schools and teachers were introduced, with morning, afternoon, and evening school shifts. Additionally, distance learning was expanded at the secondary level. However, these measures resulted in poor education quality due to inadequate teacher preparation and inadequate infrastructure.

In Africa, Free Basic Education (FBE) was implemented in response to the 1990 and 2000 World Conferences on Education for All. The 2004 Education for All (EFA)

working paper identified user fees as the biggest barrier to primary and secondary school enrolment and completion for millions of African children. The report specifically examined Uganda and Malawi. The elimination of user fees was identified as a means to strengthen countries' education systems. The 2005 World Bank report revealed that there were five distinct fee categories used in lower-secondary education in 76 World Bank client countries, including tuition fees, textbook charges, compulsory uniforms, Parent-Teacher Association (PTA)/community contributions, and other school-based activities such as exam fees. In Tanzania, parents and teachers stated that the cost of education, particularly school fees, was the main reason why children did not attend school (Bentaouet, 2006). Similarly, Zambia's central statistics office estimated that at least 45% of children who dropped out of school did so because they couldn't afford to pay school fees (Tembo & Ndhlovu, 2005, as cited in Bentaouet, 2006). It is evident that the adoption of free education policies in Tanzania and Zambia aimed to ensure equal access to basic education and potentially increase school attendance among pupils from poor families in Africa. According to Oketch and Ngware (2012), the origins of universal basic education in Tanzania and Kenya can be traced back to the 1961 Conference of African States on the Development of Education in Africa, held in Addis Ababa. While free basic education is often associated with the Jomtien and Dakar conferences, which established the current Education for All (EFA) targets, the Addis Ababa conference played a significant role in shaping the educational priorities of these two countries. The Addis Ababa conference focused on determining the educational needs that would contribute to the economic and social development of Africa. Kenya and Tanzania adopted the framework outlined at the conference, which emphasized the expansion of primary and secondary education.

In Kenya, the implementation of free education began with the elimination of school fees in semi-arid areas and the provision of fee remission for needy cases in 1974. This was followed by the introduction of free primary education for the first four years in 1975, and full free primary education in 1979 (Orodho, 2014). However, in 1988, cost-sharing measures were introduced, requiring parents to contribute to the cost of books, equipment, and school construction. This cost-sharing approach was later found to be the main reason for the decline in enrolment. Only in 2003 was free primary education reintroduced, with the government declaring the elimination of all levies for the eight years of primary education. This policy was implemented nationwide for all grades (Republic of Kenya, 2012).

In Tanzania, similar steps were taken to implement free primary education. First, the country put an end to the expulsion of students for non-payment reasons. Second, efforts were made to expand upper primary schools so that by 1974, there were sufficient places for Standard IV leavers. Third, primary school fees were abolished in 1973 (Orodho, 2014). The elimination of fees led to an increase in enrolment, indicating that cost had previously been a barrier to access. The introduction of free primary education also resulted in a higher demand for secondary education. Consequently, there was a need to expand access to secondary schools, allowing primary school leavers to continue their education at the secondary level. Since then, Kenya and Tanzania have seen positive trends in secondary school enrolment and completion rates. This can be attributed to the introduction of Free Day Secondary Education in January 2008 in Kenya and 2014 in Tanzania. However, the quality of free education has been negatively affected by a shortage of teachers and high pupil-to-textbook ratios, which have impacted student performance. The challenge for the governments now is to improve the quality of basic

education in order to enhance learning outcomes. In Uganda, the free education was not as successful as in Kenya and Tanzania until the 1990s. The lack of commitment from Ugandan leadership to expand free primary education may have been the reason for this (Oketch & Rolleston, 2007). Reforms to prepare for free primary education began in 1993, but the policy was not implemented until 1997 under President Museveni's government. This government was dedicated to providing tuition fees for four children per family, instructional materials, basic facilities, teacher salaries, and training. However, the increase in enrolment led to overcrowding and a shortage of teachers and materials. Despite these challenges, access to education for the poorest improved. However, other indicators, such as quality, teacher ratio, and resources like classrooms, worsened.

According to the Uganda Ministry of Education and Sports (2013), universal post-primary education was introduced in 2007 to enhance access to secondary education for economically vulnerable families and communities. The government's role was to subsidize secondary schools by paying school fees, providing textbooks and teaching materials, and covering administrative and maintenance costs. However, there is limited information available about the actual impact of universal secondary education on educational quality. Huylebroeck and Titeca (2015) argued that the free education program increased the number of teaching and non-teaching jobs, with many teachers primarily concerned about their own financial stability. This resulted in poor service delivery due to increased teacher absenteeism. While enrolment, attendance, and completion rates increased, parental involvement in their children's education decreased, and student performance declined since 2008. East African countries that eliminated fees witnessed significant increases in enrolment rates. For instance, Uganda increased its

enrolment rate by 68% and Malawi by 49%. Kenya also experienced an 18% increase in enrolments in 2004 due to the abolition of fees, which enabled students who had dropped out to return to school. In addition, governments increased funding for education (World Bank, 2005). The removal of fees was believed to enhance equitable access to education, particularly for the poor and disadvantaged groups. However, the implementation of the fee-free education policy presented other challenges, such as a lack of funding, inadequate infrastructure, teacher shortages, and poor quality of education.

2.6 African Union Actions towards Free Education Policy Implementation

The African Union (AU) has been actively engaged in promoting education policy in Africa, recognizing the crucial role of education in the continent's development through implementing and emphasizing different policies and projects with partnerships of different African governments. Therefore, the following are some examples of successful policies where the AU has supported education policy in various African countries: Continental Education Strategy for Africa (CESA): The AU developed the CESA as a comprehensive framework to guide education policy and implementation across the continent. CESA aims to improve access, equity, quality, and relevance of education. It sets out key priority areas, including early childhood education, basic education, technical and vocational education and training (TVET), tertiary education, and science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) education. The AU supports countries in aligning their education policies with CESA and provides technical assistance for its implementation, (Ruiz-Mallén, 2020).

According to the World Health Organization (2021), Campaign for Accelerated Reduction of Maternal Mortality in Africa (CARMMA): While not focused solely on education, CARMMA is an AU initiative that recognizes the importance of education in improving maternal health. It promotes policies that address the education and empowerment of girls and women, including comprehensive sexuality education and access to quality reproductive healthcare. By prioritizing education, CARMMA contributes to reducing maternal mortality rates and improving overall health outcomes for women and girls. The AU established the PAU as a flagship institution to promote quality higher education and research in Africa. The PAU consists of thematic institutes located in different African regions, focusing on areas such as governance, social sciences, water and energy, basic sciences, and space sciences (Chankseliani, 2021). By supporting the PAU, the AU aims to strengthen the capacity of African universities, foster collaboration, and promote cutting-edge research in priority areas for the continent's development. The AU adopted the African Youth Charter, which emphasizes the right to education and the importance of youth empowerment. The charter encourages member states to prioritize education policies that promote access, quality, relevance, and equity in education for young people (Fafunwa, 2022). It also calls for the active participation of youth in decision-making processes related to education and other sectors. The AU supports countries in implementing the provisions of the African Youth Charter and monitoring progress towards its goals.

According to Aniche (2023), the Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA), while not specifically an education policy, is an AU initiative aimed at promoting economic integration among African countries. Education is recognized as a critical component of the AfCFTA, as it fosters the development of a skilled workforce, entrepreneurship, and

innovation. The AU supports policies and programs that enhance the alignment of education and skills development with the needs of the labour market, enabling African countries to take advantage of the opportunities presented by the AfCFTA. These examples highlight the AU's commitment to advancing education policy in Africa. The AU's actions include developing continental frameworks, providing technical assistance, fostering collaboration, and advocating for the prioritization of education in national policies. Through these efforts, the AU strives to improve educational access, quality, and relevance across the continent, contributing to sustainable development and the realization of the AU's Agenda 2063 vision. According to Heras, (2020). The African Union works towards harmonizing education systems across the continent. It encourages member states to align their curricula, qualifications frameworks, and accreditation systems to promote educational mobility and facilitate the recognition of qualifications among African countries this harmonization effort aims to enhance the quality and relevance of education, facilitate student and teacher mobility, and promote regional integration.

The AU has developed the African Qualifications Framework (AQF) as a reference tool to facilitate comparability and recognition of qualifications in Africa. The AQF provides a common framework for member states to describe and classify qualifications, ensuring transparency and consistency in the assessment and validation of learning outcomes. The AQF supports the mobility of students, professionals, and skilled workers across the continent. The AU recognizes the critical role of teachers in delivering quality education. It supports initiatives to enhance teacher training, professional development, and the status of teachers. The AU advocates for improved teacher recruitment, training, and retention strategies, as well as equitable distribution of qualified teachers in remote

and disadvantaged areas. By focusing on teacher development, the AU aims to improve the quality of education and learning outcomes.

Aisiku, (2022) argued that, the AU acknowledges the importance of education in equipping individuals with the skills and competencies needed for employment and entrepreneurship. It promotes education policies that align with labour market demands and support the acquisition of relevant skills, including technical and vocational education and training (TVET). The AU encourages member states to develop TVET programs that are responsive to industry needs, promote entrepreneurship, and foster innovation. According to McCowan, (2021) the AU places a strong emphasis on youth empowerment and engagement in education policies. It recognizes that young people are key stakeholders in shaping education systems and policies. The AU encourages the participation of youth in decision-making processes, policy dialogue, and the implementation of education programs. It supports initiatives that promote youth-led innovation, entrepreneurship, and leadership development in education.

The AU undertakes monitoring and evaluation of education policies and programs in member states. It collects data, conducts research, and assesses progress towards education goals. The AU's monitoring and evaluation efforts provide evidence-based insights, identify challenges, and inform policy adjustments and interventions. This process helps member states track their progress, share best practices, and learn from each other's experiences. The AU collaborates with regional bodies, international organizations, and development partners to strengthen education policies and programs. It engages in partnerships with organizations such as UNESCO, UNICEF, the World Bank, and the Global Partnership for Education (GPE). These collaborations facilitate

knowledge sharing, resource mobilization, and the exchange of best practices to support education initiatives in African countries.

2.7 Overview of the Implementation of Free Education Policy in Rwanda

Education in Rwanda has a rich history marked by significant changes and challenges. Traditionally, education in Rwanda was informal and primarily delivered within families, with older family members serving as educators. The Belgian colonial period from 1900 to 1960 introduced formal education, focusing on providing elementary schooling under a League of Nations mandate. However, this period also exacerbated ethnic tensions between the Tutsis and Hutus due to differential access to education and opportunities (Mironko, 2009).

After gaining independence, Rwanda focused on restructuring its education system to reach more children, especially in rural areas. Post-genocide years from 1994 to 2012 were dedicated to rebuilding human capital and increasing enrollment rates. Significant reforms were introduced during this period, such as the implementation of fee-free schooling for 9 years of basic education (9YBE) covering primary and lower secondary levels. In recent years, Rwanda has shifted its focus towards improving the quality and relevance of education through initiatives like the Education Sector Strategic Plan (ESSP). The country aims to transform its citizens into skilled human capital for socio-economic development by ensuring equitable access to quality education (Theogene, 2022). The Ministry of Education oversees the education system, with a mission to combat illiteracy, promote science and technology, critical thinking, and positive values. According to Sabates, (2011), Rwanda has made remarkable progress in increasing access to education, with primary school net enrollment standing at 97 percent. Efforts

are being made by both the Rwandan government and international organizations like USAID to enhance early-grade reading outcomes in Kinyarwanda and support youth workforce development programs. These initiatives aim to equip Rwandan children and youth with essential skills for success in both schooling and the workplace.

Overall, while Rwanda has made strides in improving its education system post-genocide, challenges such as low school enrollment rates and limited resources persist. The country continues to work towards enhancing educational standards, promoting literacy, and preparing its youth for a competitive global economy, (Dushimiyimana, 2018). The Basic Education (BE) sub-sector comprises Pre-primary, Primary, and Secondary education levels, as well as non-formal education, which is commonly known as Adult Basic Education (ABE). The Education sector also includes Higher Education and a significant Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) stream at both secondary and higher education levels (Hategeka, 2022). According to Rwanda's Education Sector Strategic Plan (ESSP), 2018/2019 – 2023/2024, pre-primary education and school readiness programs are recognized as crucial foundations for future learning, particularly for children from disadvantaged backgrounds (Carter, 2022).

The plan is dedicated to expanding access to three years of early learning for children aged 3 to 6. The national goal is to increase access to 45 percent of children by 2023/2024. In 2015, a play-based, competency-based curriculum for pre-primary schools was approved (Singal, 2022). Subsequently, a teacher's guide on implementing the curriculum was developed in 2015, and a scheme of work was developed to accompany the curriculum in 2017.

The education system in Rwanda is designed to provide a comprehensive and inclusive approach to learning at different levels. It begins with pre-primary education, which is

offered in nursery schools for children aged 4 to 6. Primary education follows, lasting for six years and targeting children between the ages of 7 and 12. During this stage, the focus is on developing core literacy and numeracy skills, as well as preparing students for secondary studies. Secondary education in Rwanda also lasts for six years, with students typically aged 13 to 18. During this phase, students have the opportunity to specialize in various subjects and pursue their interests (Sibomana, 2016). Higher education is the final stage of the Rwandan education system, providing opportunities for students to pursue further studies and obtain advanced degrees. Source: In addition to the four main levels of education, Rwanda also has a significant Technical and Vocational Education and Training stream at both the secondary and higher education levels. This stream focuses on equipping students with practical skills and knowledge that are relevant to the workforce, preparing them for employment or entrepreneurship. According to Hategeka (2022), Rwanda's education system contributes significantly to the improvement of society and the country's overall educational system. Revealed that rivalry among participants and educational institute optimization characterize the evolution of educational services in Rwanda. There is also a tendency toward environmental education in several Rwandan schools. According to a study by, the primary goals of environmental education are to strengthen environmental culture and to improve students' perspectives on the environment through scientific knowledge. Despite the fact that 98% of kids seven years old and older were enrolled in elementary school, 7% of them drop out. Additionally, only 46% of students made the transition to the secondary level in 2021 (Dufitumukiza, Wanjala, & Khatete, 2021).

2.9 Conceptual Framework

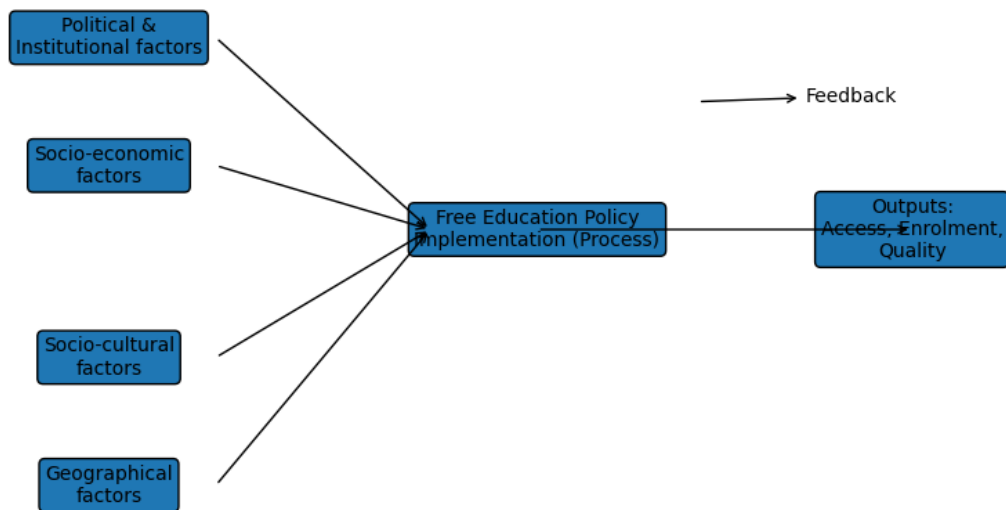


Figure 1: Conceptual Framework

Source: Bertalanffy's System Theory (1968)

Ludwin von Bertalanffy's System Theory (1968) served as the foundational framework for this study. According to this theory, a system comprises four primary components. Firstly, a system consists of objects, which encompass the various parts, elements, or variables within the system. These objects can be physical, abstract, or a combination thereof, depending on the nature of the system. Secondly, a system encompasses attributes, which denote the qualities or properties of the system and its objects. Thirdly, a system is characterized by internal relationships that exist among its objects. Lastly, systems exist within an environment. Therefore, a system can be defined as a collection of interconnected elements that interact with one another within a specific environment, giving rise to a larger pattern that is distinct from any of its individual parts (Infante, Rancer, & Womack, 1997). Bertalanffy (1968) himself elucidates that real systems are receptive to their environments, engaging in interactions, and have the capacity to

exhibit qualitatively new properties through emergence, leading to ongoing evolution. Infante et al. (1997) further assert that the fundamental systems-interactive paradigm of organizational analysis involves the continuous stages of input, throughput (processing), and output. Key characteristics of systems include wholeness and interdependence (where the whole exceeds the sum of its parts), correlations, causal perception, chain of influence, hierarchy, supersystems and subsystems, self-regulation and control, goal-oriented behaviour, interaction with the environment, inputs and outputs, the significance of balance and homeostasis, adaptability and change (morphogenesis), and equifinality, which suggests that there can be multiple pathways to achieve goals. The present study is firmly rooted in Systems Theory as free education policy can be regarded as systems where infrastructure, services, and resources serve as inputs (throughput) that transform into outputs (increase of enrolment rate, access to education, and education quality). Within schools, there exists a complex interrelationship between parents, resources, school administration, and students. Hence, the elements that constitute a school, such as students, teachers, and parents, are mutually dependent. In this system, school fees or funds contribute to the overall objectives of the school. The framework helps to visualize the relationships between various factors that interplay to affect the effectiveness of the free education policy in Bugesera district in the Eastern Province of Rwanda. The framework indicates that implementation and effectiveness of free education policy in Bugesera district in Eastern Province of Rwanda are influenced by political factors, financial factors, socio-economic factors, and cultural factors, which include the economic growth, gender and age, income level, culture, geographical location, etc.

2.10 Summary

This chapter of the review of literature covers different factors that affected the effectiveness of the free education policy in Bugesera District in Rwanda, such as socio-economic factors, socio-cultural factors, geographical location, and financial and political factors. It encompasses of the theoretical framework that will be employed by this study. It covered the ideas from other authors on what they said about free education and its effectiveness. Therefore, this chapter brings an insight into the factors affecting the free education policy in Bugesera District in Rwanda.

CHAPTER 3 METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the research methodology that was used to test the hypotheses made in Chapter One. It consists of the following sections, and it was discussed: The Research Design, Population and Sampling, Data Collection Instruments, Data Collection Procedure, Analysis and Organization of Data, and Ethical Considerations. The chapter further describes data collection procedures, a description of data analysis procedures, and ethical considerations.

3.2 The Research Design

A research design is defined as the overall plan or structure that guides the process of conducting research. It is a critical component of the research process and serves as a blueprint for how a study was carried out, including the methods and techniques that were used to collect and analyse data. A well-designed research study is essential for ensuring that the research objectives are met and that the results are valid and reliable (McKinney, 2013). The research employed a case study design, which is an approach that examines a phenomenon over time within its natural setting by focusing on the circumstances, dynamics and complexity of a single or a small number of cases (Bhattacharjee, 2012). Key characteristics of a case study include the incorporation of multiple perspectives through various data collection methods and a strong emphasis on the specific context, which is crucial for understanding the research phenomenon (Walliman, 2006). Therefore, in this context, the researcher selected Bugesera District and the education policy, secondly study focused on the factors influencing the implementation of the free education policy in Bugesera District. The research chose

Bugesera District because it's one of the districts where the education sector is struggling. The case study design was selected because it allows for a deeper, more understanding, and authentic interpretation of the factors influencing free education policy implementation.

Qualitative research design is a methodological approach aimed at exploring and understanding human experiences, meanings, and social processes within their natural contexts. It is particularly suited for studies that seek to answer "how" and "why" questions, especially in complex social environments where variables are difficult to quantify. According to Creswell and Poth (2018), qualitative research involves gathering data in natural settings and interpreting participants' perspectives to develop a comprehensive understanding of a phenomenon. Similarly, Norman and Yvonna (2018), emphasize that qualitative research is inherently interpretive, focusing on how individuals derive meaning from their experiences.

Qualitative research design is commonly employed in fields such as education and public policy to investigate processes, perceptions, and lived realities. For instance, in studying policy implementation, it allows researchers to explore how policies are experienced by various stakeholders, including teachers, students, and administrators. Data collection methods typically include in-depth interviews, focus groups, observations, and document analysis, which provide rich and detailed insights (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). The analysis process is inductive, involving coding and the development of themes that emerge from the data rather than being predetermined (Patton, 2015). This approach enables researchers to capture the complexity of social phenomena and generate context-specific knowledge that can inform both practice and

theory (Maxwell, 2013). Data were collected from primary sources and some from secondary sources (through questionnaire, interviews, and documentary analysis).

3.3 Population and Sampling

3.3.1 Target Population

Polit and Hungler (1999) define population as the totality of all subjects that conform to a set of specifications, comprising the entire group of persons that is of interest to the researcher and to whom the research results can be generalized. The target population of this study was 518 people, which includes all the 470 teachers in Bugesera District, 31 head teachers, 15 Local sector education officers, and 2 district education officers in public secondary schools in Bugesera District. District education officers and head teachers were considered to have common information and experience on the situation of free education policy implementation and effectiveness in Bugesera District.

3.4 Sampling

According to Thompson (2012), sampling is a process in statistical analysis in which researchers take a predetermined number of observations from a larger population. It allows researchers to conduct studies about a large group by using a small portion of the population. The method of sampling depends on the type of analysis being performed, but it may include simple random sampling or systematic sampling

3.4.1 Sampling techniques

According to MacMillan and Schumacher (2010), purposive samples can have a range of 1 to 50 because the qualitative method engage small group. Since they are the top administrators of education at the district level, the information provided by District

Education Officers was crucial to the study. They have an obligation to see to it that all of their schools promote high-quality education. The investigator believed that they would be the ideal candidates since they have a thorough awareness of the issues and constraints pertaining to high-quality instruction in the district schools under their supervision. Purposive sampling techniques were used to select the Bugesera district because it has a high number of children and youth who are not at school and have failed to attend school. Schools were purposely selected because they are located in the Bugesera District. Head teachers were purposely selected because their schools were included in the sample. Officers in charge were purposely selected because they are actively involved in helping implement the free education policy in Bugesera District. The stratified sampling technique was used to sample teachers to ensure equal representation of the subgroup. Simple random sampling was used to select the required number of teachers and schools to participate in the study.

3.4.2 Purposive sampling

Purposive sampling, sometimes referred to as purposeful sampling, is a technique that is frequently employed in qualitative research to choose particular instances or participants in accordance with the investigator's assessment and the goal of the investigation. The purpose of this selection strategy is to select cases with a wealth of information that can offer detailed insights into the phenomenon being studied. The teachers, head teachers, local education councils, and district education officers were selected to participate in the study as they have experience with the free education policy, and they are experts in the education system, as they are a part of it.

3.4.3 Sampling procedures

In this study, both probability and non-probability sampling techniques were adopted because of the selected research design. Singh and Nath (2007) indicate that the combination of these sampling techniques yields consistent information, as the results from one method were used to illustrate results from the other

3.4.4 Sample size

An appropriate sample that meets the requirements of performance, representation, consistency, and versatility should be optimized (Grawitz, 2001). Sampling is the selection method for individuals or instances for studies. A sample is a set of people that only comprises a part of the population. In an attempt to do this study, this method was used to select a limited number of participants. Therefore, to make sure that each group was represented in the sample size of 50 people, the sample size of the stratified formula was used to come up with the sample size from each group, which made a total sample size of 50 people, which is consist by 45 Teachers, 3 headteachers, one District education officer, and one local education officer.

Table 1: Sample size table

Strata subgroup	Sample size (50)	Number of People from each category	Number of People in Sample
Teachers		470	$(50/518)*470=45$
Head teachers		31	$50/518)*31=3$
District education officers		15	$(50/518)*15=1$

Local education officers		2	$(50/518)*2=1$
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The sample size is $45+2+1=50$

3.5 Data Collection Instruments

Data collection is the process of gathering and measuring information on variables of interest in a systematic and organized manner. It is an essential step in research and analysis, as it provides the foundation for generating insights, making informed decisions, and drawing conclusions (Meye, 2020). Data collection methods can vary depending on the nature of the study and the type of data being collected. Common techniques include surveys, interviews, observations, experiments, and secondary data analysis. Data collection is an important step where the researchers strive to obtain real and relevant data based on the highlighted aim and research problem. There are two main data collection approaches: primary and secondary data collection. In the present study, the researcher followed the primary data and engaged a bit in secondary data collection technique. This is because it would allow the researcher to directly contact the research population to gather their perspectives on the highlighted study. Moreover, primary data are fairly recent and give first-hand information compared to secondary data, which relies on pre-existing information (Nelson, 2020). In short, through the primary data collection technique, the researchers could generate factual data through the survey method with the help of a structured questionnaire. Surveys provided a high level of capability to represent a large population without any subjectivity (Pluye, 2018). Therefore, three data collection instruments were used in this study. These were a questionnaire, an interview guide, and document analysis.

3.5.1 Questionnaire

According to Krosnick, (2018) questionnaire is the practice of formulating an organized list of inquiries or items with the goal of obtaining particular data from participants. It entails creating legitimate and trustworthy questions that support the study's goals, putting them in a sensible sequence, and deciding on the best way to distribute the questionnaire. Therefore, the researcher used a structured questionnaire for collecting the data from the teachers and headmasters, the village education officers and the District education officers. The study used a questionnaire with both closed and open-ended questions. The open-ended questions enabled the respondents to elaborate more on their information, while the closed-ended ones helped in getting many questions answered in a short time.

3.5.2 Interviews

According to Fontana, (2005) interview was used to describe the methodical preparation and organization of interviews carried out for a research project. It entails choosing the best interview style, creating pertinent questions, setting up a structure for gathering data, and making sure the interview procedure was in line with the goals of the study. In research, interview design was very important since it affects the validity, reliability, and quality of the data that is gathered. Interviews were conducted with the teachers, headmasters, village education officers, and district education officers used a questionnaire as an interview guide. The interviews took place at selected schools, lasting about one hour. Responses were recorded, written, and transcribed by the researcher. The researcher used a face-to-face questionnaire interview mode of data

collection because of a number of merits, which include: a high response rate, it allows probing for further explanation, and no questions are left unanswered.

3.5.3 Documentary Analysis

According to Oso et al. (2005) conducted a document analysis that involved a thorough evaluation of data obtained from public or private sources pertinent to the subject under review (Willis, 2005:38). As part of this process, a record review was performed to gather data from a variety of literary documents, thereby providing the researcher with valuable insights in the area of analysis.

3.6 Data collection procedures

In the first round, data were collected about the problem stated. However, this was accomplished through using key informants. Therefore, after an adequate number of participants agreed to participate in the study. However, the researcher sent information and a notice about the study to every individual participant. The approach and the aim of the study were elaborated to the individuals participating as well as problems which were addressed individually. The researcher met each participant at an agreed time and place. Data collection procedures. The researcher visited selected schools one by one according to the appointment given by the school head teachers. The researcher was discussed with the head teachers of each school and briefed each on the purpose and objectives of the study. The questionnaires were administered to each after discussion. On the same day, the researcher met with the teachers to discuss with them, administer a questionnaire, and agreed on the day of observation of the lesson. After that, the researcher organized a two-day visit to the District education office to interview the officers in charge and a five-day visit to interview local education councils. The

researcher administered the questionnaires personally to the selected respondents. The questionnaires were collected immediately after the research participants completed them. This ensured a high return rate of the questionnaires.

3.7 Analysis and Organization of Data

3.7.1 Thematic Analysis

The study used Thematic Analysis, and the data were analysed through thematic analysis. Thematic analysis (TA) focuses on identifying patterned meanings across data sets or themes that are important to the description of a phenomenon and associated with a specific research question. This method was used to identify, analyse, and report patterns (themes) within the broad spectrum of data related to Free Education Implementation. It minimally organises and describes the researcher's data set in detail and often goes further to interpret various aspects of the research topic (Braun and Clarke, 2006). Thematic analysis can be used to analyse quantitative data sets to identify patterns and themes. This type of analysis can be particularly useful when the data is complex or when the researcher is looking to uncover relationships between the data and other variables. Thematic analysis to analyse a survey data set in order to identify themes in the responses. The researcher could look for relationships between the responses and other variables, such as age, gender, or education level. This can help the researcher to better understand the data and draw more meaningful conclusions.

3.7.2 Content Analysis

To gain an in-depth understanding on the Free education policy, the researcher employed content analysis to be able to identify variations, themes, and relations in

information retrieved from the document review process. Information from journals, policy documents, reports, newspapers, handbooks, procedure manuals and books was analysed. Content analysis defines the process of summarizing and reporting written data. Krippendorp (2004:18) defines it as a research technique for making replicable and valid inferences from texts (or meaningful matter) to contexts of their use. Themes that answered the research questions on education equity were coded and used to inform the study.

3.8 Ethical Consideration

According to Gajjar (2013), ethical consideration is a collection of guidelines for research procedures and designs. A set of ethical guidelines must be followed by scientists and researchers when gathering data from subjects. These factors seek to uphold academic or scientific integrity, improve the validity of the research, and safeguard research participants' rights. Ethics play a crucial role in every research project. Researchers have a responsibility to adhere to ethical standards in their work, as failing to do so can result in legal consequences. In this study, the researchers meticulously followed ethical guidelines. Firstly, a research permit was obtained from the Bugesera District Education Office. With respect to informed consent, the researcher made known the purpose of the study to the participants so that they could choose to participate or not. Confidentiality and anonymity were maintained by obtaining consent forms from participants, allowing them the right to withdraw, and ensuring that their personal information remained undisclosed. Secondly, the study emphasized transparency and honesty by abstaining from including irrelevant, fabricated, or plagiarized content that could mislead readers. Lastly, the study's findings were current

and genuine. Any information that was from peer-reviewed journal articles was appropriately cited to prevent copyright infringement. The authors were properly acknowledged through in-text citations, and a comprehensive reference list was provided at the end of this study. Furthermore, the research project also considers research ethics. It was carried out in accordance with ethical considerations without violating those that apply to humans and plants.

3.9 Summary

This chapter covered the research methodology that the researcher used to conduct the study. It discussed topics such as research design, population and sampling, as well as data collection instruments, data collection procedure, analysis, and data organization, as well as the ethical considerations that the researcher was engaged in during this study. This research employed a qualitative and case study design to interpret and understand the factors influencing free education policy implementation in Bugesera District.

CHAPTER 4 DATA PRESENTATION, ANALYSIS, AND INTERPRETATION

4.1 Introduction

This chapter presents and analyses the data of the study on the factors influencing free education policy on its implementation in schools in Bugesera District, Rwanda. The researcher collected the data from the head teachers, teachers, local education councils, and the District Education Officer; all subjects came from the selected schools in Bugesera District. The questionnaires, interview guides, and document analysis were used to collect information. The data analysis process was guided by the research questions, and the data interpretation was done in light of a review of related literature on the free education policy implementation.

4.2 Data Presentation and Analysis

This section presents and analyzes the findings gathered from conducting the interviews and document analysis related to the factors influencing the Free Education Policy Implementation in Bugesera District. The findings are categorized based on the research objectives under the following main headings or themes.

4.2.1 Return Rate of Research Instruments

The questionnaires and interview guides were distributed to 80 teachers, 8 head teachers, 10 local education councils, and two DEOs were interviewed as described in chapter three. The response return rate from selected schools in Bugesera District.

4.2.2 Demographic Information of the Respondents

This section describes the biographical characteristics of the participants in the study area. Such a description was important in providing a clear understanding of the participants, which may have an influence on the results. This section covers gender, age, academic qualification, teaching experience, length of stay in the current school, and other teachers' responsibilities in the schools and participants' location.

4.2.2.1 Gender of the Respondents

The study attempts to identify the gender of research participants in order to establish the percentages of teachers, head teachers, local education councils, and DEOs, based on their gender identity

Table 2: Gender of study Participant

Gender	Teacher	%	Head Teacher	%	District Ed. Officer	%	Local Ed. Council	%
Male	64	80	6	75	2	100	7	70
Female	16	20	2	25	0	0	3	30
Total	80	100	8	100	2	100	10	100

According to the information in Table 4 2, the participants representing 64 (80%) teachers were male, whilst 16 (20%) were female. Data also show that 6 (75%) of head teachers were male and 2 (25%) were female. Furthermore, 2 (100%) of DEO were

male, whilst females were 0 (0%). Moreover, 7 (70%) Local education councils were male, and 3(30%) were female. Therefore, data revealed a gender disparity in both teachers and head teachers in secondary schools in the Bugesera District. This shows that there are a few girls who attained higher qualifications in education due to family roles, while the boys easily have access to higher education. The majority of females prefer getting married before going for further studies. Probably, most female teachers are found in primary schools where a lower level of qualification is required.

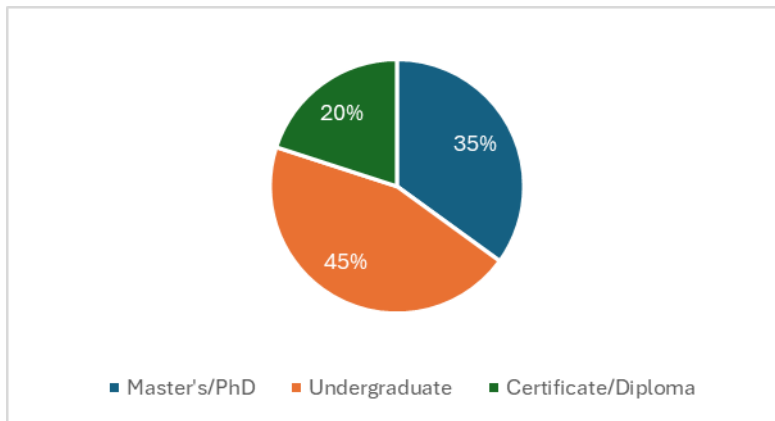
4.2.2.2 Level of qualification of Study Participants

Table 3: Qualification level

Qualifications	Number of Respondents	Percentage (%)
Master’s, PhD	35	35
Undergraduate (Bachelors)	45	45
Certificate/Diploma	20	20
Total	100	100

As the results from the above table 4.2 show that 35% of respondents have Masters Level and 45% have a Bachelor’s degree, and 20 % of respondents have a Diploma. Therefore, the findings show that most participants have undergraduate education qualifications and a high level of education (master’s and PhD). The findings suggest that the participants who participated in the study have been in the education sector, and they have knowledge and understand about free education policy.

Figure 2: Summary of the education level of participants

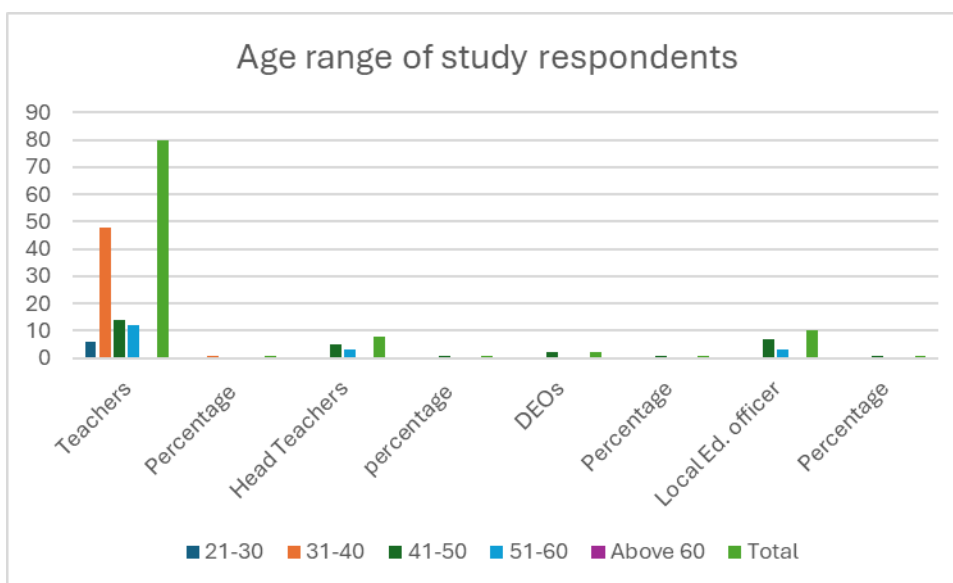


Source: Researcher

Table 4. Age Distribution of Respondents

Age category (years)	Teachers	Percentage	Head Teachers	percentage	DEOs	Percentage	Local Ed. officer	Percentage
21-30	6	8%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%
31-40	48	60%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%
41-50	14	18%	5	63%	2	100%	7	70%
51-60	12	15%	3	38%	0	0%	3	30%
Above 60	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%
Total	80	100%	8	100%	2	100%	10	100%

Figure 3: Age Distribution of Respondents Summary



From most of teacher participants 68 (76%) were 50 years old and below. This included teachers between 21-30 years (8%), teachers between 31-40 years (60%) and teachers between 41-50 years (18%). Similarly, the table shows that 3 (38%) head teachers were 50 years and below, including head teachers between 41-50 years (68%) while 2 (100%) of the DEOs were between 41-50 years. Furthermore, local education councils were between 41-50 years (70%), and (30%) were between 51-60 years.

4.3 To what extent the implementation of the free education policy in Rwanda successful?

Question	Response	Respondent %
Examine whether the implementation of the free education policy in Rwanda was successful	Increase in enrollment	73%
	Increase classrooms buildings	47%
	Increase in school infrastructure	33%
	Decrease of school's necessary costs	26%
	Decrease in associated school costs	18%

Table 5. The level of implementation of the Free Education Policy

The table above shows what the study found; it shows that there have been progressive successes since the implementation of the policy in 2003. The average number of respondents highlighted and analysis the study sought that

73 % of respondents expressed that there has been an increase in enrollment of students since the implementation of free education, and 47 % of respondents also mentioned that the classroom buildings have increased as well. Therefore, most teachers mentioned

that classrooms have increased, though classrooms are still few to accommodate students. Additionally, 33 % of respondents expressed that since the implementation of the free education policy, there has been an increase of school infrastructures, such as laboratories and libraries. However, only 26 % of respondents expressed that there have decrease in school necessities and 74 % mentioned that school necessities did not decrease. Teachers mentioned that some students still struggle to afford them, and schools do not provide them. Based on the respondents' responses about associated school costs, only 18 % expressed that there was a decrease in associated school costs, such as transportation costs, food, since the implementation of the free education policy in Bugesera. The researcher asked another question about the extent to what extend that free education policy has been implemented. The researcher wanted to know the level of policy implementation in Bugesera District so far.

The education policy has been implemented by 67 percent. The government introduced the nine-year and twelve-year education system. The fees has removed and more schools built in the district (nine respondents).

4.4 Government efforts toward the implementation of free education policy

From the data collected from interviews and documents, the efforts and actions, and strategies of the government of Rwanda toward the implementation and success of the free education policy. During the interview, all 100 participants had a common answer and view that the Government tried and put more effort towards the free education policy for its initiative to implementation for it to achieve its goals and target for every children access to education and increase the enrollment 100%. Although they

mentioned the government's effort, the study also sought the factors that hindered the implementation of the free education policy through the research questions.

4.4.1 Increase of Primary and Secondary school rooms

The research identified that it has been an increase of the number of schools and school rooms in Bugesera District since the government introduced the free education policy in Rwanda. One of the respondents (headteacher) mentioned that:

Since the government introduces free education policy in 2003. The government has built more schools and increased classroom space through the free education policy. There were only three schools in 4 sectors, but there are 6 schools right now. Besides that, here at this school it used to be fourteen classrooms, but nine more classrooms have been built, and now there are twenty-three classrooms after the government introduced the policy. This has increased the number of students that the school can take and its capacity to accommodate more students. Some classrooms have been built, but we still need more to reduce the overcrowding in the classrooms.

Therefore, this facilitates the students and families who have no money to afford school fees to access education. Furthermore, study findings highlighted that the government has put more effort into implementing the free education policy through its efforts to build more schools. Particularly In Bugesera district. Through the question asked, there are effectiveness and changes in education since the government introduced the policy in 2003. From the findings, the study found that there are some positive changes in the education system.

The common answers were highlighted from respondents, it used to be difficult, almost impossible for some students to access high school, since most of the schools were private and located in town as well, this was because of the costs of education but as the government removed tuition fees through the implementation of free education policy, more children have been able to attend school. The introduction of nine-year schools has increased the enrollment of students attending high school.

The findings highlighted that the government has put more effort into implementing the free education policy.

4.4.2 Availability of teachers

The teachers are the crucial stakeholders in the education sector and system, and they play a great role in the implementation of education policy. Therefore, the researcher posed the question about the availability of teachers if there were enough, and if there would be an increase in teachers. From the findings, the study found that there was an increase in the number of teachers through government funds in line with the implementation of the free education policy. The interview respondent headteacher pointed out that.

The number of teachers has increased over the years. The school recruited more than 6 teachers between 2019 and 2024 (Gashora High School Respondent).

The research posed another question about the source of the funds that schools used to hire more teachers and pay them. Interview respondent, District Education Office, said that.

Since the ratification of the free education policy, the government has supported the school in paying the teachers' salaries through the district budget.

This highlighted that the government did not put more effort into building school but also invested in recruiting teachers in line with the implementation of the free education policy.

4.5 Barriers and Hindrances affecting the implementation of the free education policy in Bugesera District.

Based on the findings collected from the interviews and documentary analysis indicate that the government put more effort in implementation of policy through building more

schools and recruiting more teachers. However, study revealed the barriers, and hindrance affected the effective implementation of policy in Bugesera District and to achieve its target and goals; these factors included economic, socio-economic, culture and geographical location.

4.5.1 Infrastructure constraints

One of the goals of the free education policy is access to education to all children regardless of their background and status. However, the study identified that there is inadequate infrastructure and facilities, especially for people with disabilities in most of the schools where the research was conducted in Bugesera District.

The classrooms are insufficient to accommodate more students. There is no laboratory to use for science subjects. The teachings are delivered in a congestion environment due to the small and inadequate classrooms and desks (eight Ruhuha secondary school teachers responded).

The study sought the other respondents from Gashora High School, who highlighted that the inadequacies of the school infrastructures are the main barrier to the implementation of the free education policy. In their words:

The school has a few rooms, which limit the number of children that the school takes per intake, and there is no laboratory. The school is not able to accommodate people in wheelchairs. This is one of the challenges that school is facing in the alignment of free education for all.

The researcher wanted to find more about the impact of infrastructure on the success of the implementation of the free education policy and how challenging it is. The respondents mentioned that.

The desks in the class are inadequate, and the few that are available do not support people with disabilities. This has impacted and declined the number of students schools take, and it has limited schools' ability to admit people with disabilities (teachers responded).

Therefore, the study sought that there was a lack of desks and inadequate classrooms and the toilets to accommodate student especial people with disabilities.

For the secondary data, the study sought that, in Rwanda, the Special Needs Education Policy places great emphasis on the significance of ensuring physical accessibility in schools. Although efforts have been made to enhance the accessibility of the built environment, there remains a discrepancy between policy and execution. Specifically, students with intellectual disabilities encounter notable obstacles in obtaining basic education (Karangwa, 2018). They frequently endure social stigma and exclusion, while educators lack the essential training and resources to offer appropriate accommodations. Consequently, students with mild intellectual disabilities encounter difficulties in mainstream schools and often discontinue their education (Aminta, 2013). Furthermore, children with disabilities face significant challenges in accessing education. Many schools in Rwanda lack the necessary infrastructure to support students with disabilities, such as ramps or accessible toilets which leads to significantly lower enrolment of disabled persons into primary school (UNICEF, n.d.). In addition, there is a shortage of trained teachers who can provide specialized education and support for students with disabilities.

4.5.2 Cultural Influence

The cultural practices have shaped educational participation. In some communities, household responsibilities are prioritized over schooling, especially for girls. Such practices contribute to gender disparities in access to education, as girls are more likely to be withdrawn from school to support domestic work (Hategekimana, 2011). These challenges are more pronounced in rural areas such as Bugesera District, where access to

education is generally more limited compared to urban centers, and where cultural barriers tend to be more deeply entrenched.

Access to higher education in Bugesera District is further constrained by a range of interconnected socio-cultural and structural factors. As noted by Nesaratnam et al. (2022), exclusion from higher education is shaped by complex dynamics of class, gender, and race. These dynamics interact with broader institutional and cultural structures, as well as individual agency (Mirza, 2020). Similarly, Osumba (2021) highlights that organizational, socio-cultural, and individual factors contribute to the underrepresentation of students from Bugesera District in higher learning institutions, both as students and faculty. Statistical evidence supports this trend; for instance, there was a 1.8% decrease in student enrollment in higher education from the Eastern Province, including Bugesera District, during the 2017/2018 academic year, a pattern consistent with the preceding years (MINEDUC, 2018).

Cultural factors play a dual role in influencing the implementation and effectiveness of the Free Education Policy in Bugesera District. On the one hand, education is highly valued within Rwandan society, which encourages parental and community support for schooling (Nkurunziza, 2012). Cultural beliefs and practices can undermine these efforts. For example, traditional gender norms in some communities continue to prioritize boys' education over that of girls, thereby limiting equal participation in free education programs.

The Rwandan government has demonstrated a strong commitment to education as a driver of national development. As argued by Bambujijumugisha (2016), education is central to poverty reduction strategies and is a key pillar of the country's Vision 2020

agenda, which promotes universal access to primary and secondary education. Government investments in infrastructure development and teacher training further reflect this commitment (Mberimana, 2018). However, according to Rutayisire (2015), cultural beliefs, gender norms, and socioeconomic inequalities continue to affect access to education, particularly for marginalized groups such as girls, rural children, and children with disabilities. These challenges highlight the need for targeted interventions that address cultural biases, promote inclusive educational policies, and provide support mechanisms to ensure equitable access.

4.6 Socio-Economic factors affecting the effectiveness of the Free Education policy in Bugesera District in Rwanda

4.6.1 Household/Parents' income

The United Nations Sustainable Development Goals emphasize equitable and accessible education as a global priority. In Rwanda, this objective is actively pursued, yet it remains only partially achieved. Although the Free Education Policy has reduced direct school fees, many families continue to face indirect costs associated with education, including expenses for uniforms, books, meals, and other school supplies. In addition, the opportunity cost of children's labor, particularly their contribution to household and agricultural work, limits school attendance (Mberimana, 2018). From the same standpoint, there exist various obstacles to the successful accessing and completion of education. According to a study conducted by the World Bank (2006), recent research has pinpointed several factors that affect the implementation and effectiveness of the fee education policy in rural areas of Rwanda, such as Bugesera District.

From the 15 Respondents from Rutonde primary and secondary school, the study findings revealed that the parents' income is one of the barriers and factors that affect the implementation of the free education policy. The respondents:

The people here in Bugesera District are farmers, and they get a low income, which is make hard for the parents to afford other school necessities, materials, and requirements. All there is no school fees, but there are other associated schooling expenses, school accessibility, community involvement, transportation, and the opportunity costs associated with attending school. Due to the low-income people in Bugesera District, the parents are struggling to afford those expenses, as well as being unwilling to send their children to school.

The respondents from Nyamata High School, on how the household income affects the implementation of the free education policy in Bugesera District, highlighted that:

Apart from the school fees, individual schools have their own charges, which are hard for the parents to afford. For example, here, there are sports charges, food, health insurance, and transport. This has challenged the parents to afford these associated charges and end up not sending their children to school.

The poverty and low parental education level have been linked to lower educational attainment and school dropout rates. And, in some cases, economic pressures can lead to child labor and child marriage, which can also prevent children from attending school (Oreste, 2021). So, socio-economic factors have a significant impact on education outcomes.

According to Nzabalirwa, (2020), poverty affects education. For many families, poverty is a barrier to accessing education, as they may not be able to afford school fees or supplies. In addition, poor nutrition and health can also lead to poor academic performance and higher rates of school dropout. In some cases, children may be forced to work or get married in order to support their families, which can prevent them from attending school. Another negative impact of socio-economic factors on education is the

digital divide. This is the gap between those who have access to digital technologies and those who do not. This divide can make it difficult for some (Nshimirimana, 2022).

In Rwanda, socio-economic factors have affected free education in several ways. First, as mentioned before, poverty makes it difficult for families to afford the necessary supplies and materials for school. In addition, many families in the Bugesera district are subsistence farmers, which means that they have limited time and resources to support their children's education (Nkiliye, 2020). This leads to lower rates of enrolment and higher rates of dropout. Another issue is that many students in Bugesera District come from rural areas, which can make it difficult for them to access quality education. Finally, Rwanda's history of conflict and genocide has a lasting impact on families and students, which affects their ability to access and benefit from free education. All of these factors can have a significant impact on the implementation and effectiveness of free education in Bugesera District.

Strategies to Prevention. However, there are some initiatives in place to address these challenges (Kitula, 2022). For example, the government of Rwanda has implemented a system of free primary and secondary education, and it has also invested in improving infrastructure and teacher training. In addition, some NGOs and international organizations are working to provide support for students and families in need. So, while socio-economic factors can have a significant impact on education in Rwanda, there are efforts underway to address these challenges (Žur, 2020). Free education has been shown to increase enrolment rates, especially among girls. In addition, it has helped to reduce poverty and improve living standards for families. It has also helped to promote social mobility, as more people are able to access higher education and better job

opportunities. And finally, it has helped to promote national unity and reconciliation in Rwanda, as students from different backgrounds are able to learn together. Overall, free education has had a positive impact on Rwanda, despite the challenges it faces.

Students to access educational resources and participate in online learning. In addition, the digital divide can contribute to a cycle of inequality, as those who are unable to access digital technologies may be at a disadvantage in the job market (Krzykawska, 2020). In summary, the negative effects of socio-economic factors on education include higher dropout rates, lower levels of academic achievement, and limited access to digital technologies. These factors lead to barriers to accessing education and success for many children and youth in Bugesera district. According to Mukingambeho, (2022), free education has been shown to increase enrolment rates, especially among girls. In addition, it has helped to reduce poverty and improve living standards for families. It has also helped to promote social mobility, as more people are able to access higher education and better job opportunities. And finally, it has helped to promote national unity and reconciliation in Rwanda, as students from different backgrounds are able to learn together. Overall, free education has had a positive impact on Rwanda, despite the challenges it faces (Nshimirimana, 2022).

4.7 Geographical factors affecting the effectiveness of free education policy in Bugesera District

4.7.1 Long Distance Barrier

When considering the proximity of schools, students in the Bugesera District in Eastern Province still have to commute for over 30 minutes to reach the nearest schools (WB, 2019a). According to international guidelines for accessible school localization

standards, it is recommended that primary school-aged children should not have to walk more than 30 minutes from their home to the nearest school (World Bank, 2019a). However, NISR (2018) reports that 46% of primary school-aged children in the country, particularly those in rural areas of Eastern Province, Districts, such as Bugesera District have to walk for more than 30 minutes to reach their nearest school from home. Moreover, the evidence indicates that over 20% of middle school children have to walk for at least an hour to reach school.

According to Kattan and Burnett, (2004) there are other factors that contribute to parents' decision not to enroll their children in school. These factors encompass a lack of information regarding the correlation between education and the job prospects available in the local area, as well as the geographical distance between schools and labor markets. Based on the available evidence, Erneste, (2021) it is imperative to highlight that the existence of remote schools poses a significant barrier to accessing education, consequently leading to substandard quality of education. This is primarily due to the fact that students residing far away frequently encounter difficulties such as arriving late, being fatigued and hungry, and occasionally being unable to attend classes due to adverse weather conditions. Hence, it is crucial to establish supplementary educational institutions to effectively tackle this predicament. Two respondents, teachers from Kindama secondary school, highlighted that:

Most of our students walk more than 30 minutes to get to school. This is because Kindama Secondary School is the only school in the whole Kindama sector. However, this makes it difficult for students who live far from the school to attend school, and some children end up not enrolling in the school as the schools are far from their homes.

Furthermore, equity pertains to the pursuit of fairness in education, ensuring equal access, resources, and outcomes for students of various genders, social classes, races, language origins, and geographical locations (Belfield & Levin, 2002:46). According to UNESCO (2008), equity denotes the provision of just and fair access and opportunities for children and adults, with the objective of reducing disparities based on factors such as gender, poverty, residence, ethnicity, language, and more. The primary aim of the education sector is to promote quality, equitable, and effective education for all Rwandans (MINEDUC, 2010). Similarly, one of the key objectives of the EDPRS for education is to enhance and expand equity in education at all levels (Ibid). However, the equitable distribution of resources across schools nationwide remains a work in progress. In regard to access to electricity and technology, a mere 32% of primary schools and 51% of secondary schools were connected to the national electrical grid in 2016. Additionally, only 13% of secondary schools had access to the internet.

4.8 Social-political factors affecting the effectiveness of free education policy in Bugesera District, Rwanda

4.8.1 History and Political Legacy Influence

The education in general and free education in Rwanda have faced challenges due to social-political hindrances that have impacted the effectiveness and sustainability of this policy. Several factors contribute to these hindrances, including historical legacies, governance issues, resource constraints, and societal attitudes. One significant social-political hindrance is the legacy of the 1994 genocide in Rwanda, which resulted in the destruction of infrastructure and institutions, including the education system (Mironko, 2009). The aftermath of the genocide created a fragmented society with deep-seated

divisions that continue to affect social cohesion and trust in government initiatives such as free education. Rebuilding trust and promoting reconciliation among different ethnic groups are essential for ensuring the success of free education programs. Furthermore, Rwanda has a history of political instability and conflict, which has made it difficult to implement and maintain educational programs (Uvin, 2009). This includes the genocide of 1994, which had a devastating impact on the country's education system. In addition, Rwanda is still dealing with the legacy of this conflict, which makes it difficult to focus on free education policy and its effectiveness.

4.8.2 Corruption and Distribution of Funds

According to Reyntjens, (2013) Governance issues also play a role in hindering the effectiveness of free education in Rwanda. In the past years, there were issues of corruption, inefficiency, and lack of transparency in government institutions that led to mismanagement of resources allocated for education, undermining the quality and accessibility of free education services. Addressing these governance challenges requires strong political will, institutional reforms, and accountability mechanisms to ensure that resources are effectively utilized for educational purposes (Twagilimana, 2015). The corruption caused multiple challenges, such as resource constraints and financial constraints, which hindered and slowed down the implementation of the free education policy in Bugesera District. According to Nkurunziza, (2017) resource constraints pose another obstacle to the effectiveness and progress of free education in Bugesera District in Rwanda. Despite government efforts to increase funding for education, limited financial resources remain a barrier to providing quality education for all Rwandan children. Insufficient infrastructure, inadequate teacher training, and a lack of

educational materials hinder the delivery of effective learning experiences in schools (Makuza, 2017). Addressing these resource constraints requires sustainable financing mechanisms and strategic planning to prioritize investments in key areas such as teacher development and school infrastructure.

There is a high level of corruption in the administration, and the funds are not being used as they are supposed to be used, and there is no accountability. The participants from Ruhuha secondary school of the rural school in Bugesera District highlighted that the distribution and allocation of the funds are being given to the Urban schools due to the corruption of the leaders and left the rural schools with short funds (respondents).

4.9 Comparison of the Impacts of Free Education Policy before and After Implementation

There are nowadays improvements in Rwandan education, particularly in the Bugesera District, compared to the education system or sector before the government introduced the Free Education policy in 2003. When the respondents were asked how education system before the implementation of the policy was , compared to education after the introduction of free education policy in Bugesera District responded that;

The new school has been built, and the number of the school increased. Rural children have access to education. The number of people attending high school increases through the nine-year and twelve-year education system. This was introduced after the government introduced the free education policy (seven Respondents).

4.10 Discussion and Interpretation

This segment focuses on discussing recurring themes that arose from the research findings. The themes captured from the data collected during the study are in line with the research questions and study objectives. The first theme focused on and revealed the qualifications, ages, gender, and the level of experience, as well as the level to which the free education policy has been implemented in Bugesera District. The study highlighted

the government's efforts toward implementing the free education policy in Bugesera District. It revealed that the government has put effort into building and increasing classrooms and schools, and funding to recruit more teachers. Another theme focuses success of the policy, and the study sought to demonstrate that there was some level of success, such as an increase in schools, teachers, and some enrollment percentage.

Furthermore, another theme focused on the factors that lead to success or failure in the implementation of the free education policy in Bugesera District. Therefore, the barriers that affect the implementation of the free education policy in Bugesera District have been revealed. It revealed the infrastructure constraints, where schools have to invest in infrastructure to support the people with disabilities, and found that the classrooms are not adequate to accommodate more students, which ended up causing congestion in the class. Several barriers were identified at both the individual and structural levels, such as corruption, cultural, and financial constraints.

The study shows that issues of poverty in Bugesera District and cultural practices have shaped educational participation and the implementation of the free education policy. In some communities, household responsibilities are prioritized over schooling, especially for girls. Such practices contribute to gender disparities in access to education, as girls are more likely to be withdrawn from school to support domestic work (Hategekimana, 2011)

Therefore, from the findings, the most commonly identified barrier was an infrastructure constraint and social culture. This has been anchored and comprehensively documented in the literature pertaining to the implementation of free education policy research (Rutayisire, 2015).

4.11 Chapter Summary

The chapter presented and analyzed data from the study, which focused on Factors influencing the implementation of the Free Education Policy in Bugesera District. The researcher made use of thematic information organized with the participants' views in presentation, discussion, and analysis of the collected data. The chapter also linked the presented data with other relevant literature on the

CHAPTER 5 DISCUSSION, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Introduction

This chapter gives the discussion, conclusions, and implications, recommendations of the study, and suggestions for further research. These are based on the research findings as presented in chapter four. Proposals for further studies are also made in this chapter.

5.2 Discussion

The main objective of the study was to assess the factors influencing the implementation of the free education policy in Bugesera District, Rwanda. The researcher was inspired to conduct this research because of the concern about the free education policy that was established in Rwanda in 2003. The researcher particularly wanted to assess the level of implementation of the policy and factors influencing its failure or success in Bugesera District. The researcher wanted to explore the way and factors that affect the implementation of free education and recommend a way to implement the policy. Therefore, the study used qualitative and case study methods to collect the data. However, the target population consisted of local education councils, teachers, and head teachers, as well as the District Education Officers (DEOs). Purposive sampling was used to select head teachers and DEOs, while teachers were selected by the use of proportionate simple random sampling. The study sampled 80 teachers, 8 head teachers, 2 DEOs, and 10 local education councils. Data was accessed using questionnaires, interviews, document analysis, and observation guides. All 80 teachers attended the questionnaires, and all the DEOs and head teachers were able to attend scheduled interviews. The content validity of the instruments was determined by supervisors and

lecturers in CUEA. They ensured that the instruments measured various aspects of quality education. The reliability of the questionnaire items was facilitated by the test-retest technique. A Spearman correlation formula was used to determine the reliability of the teachers' questionnaire. The reliability coefficient obtained was 0.83, which enabled the researcher to conclude that the questionnaires were reliable. The study findings are, therefore, summarized as follows. The findings are presented according to the research questions:

5.2.1 The extent to which the Free Education Policy affected Education

The study identified various school aspects that were affected by free education: The number became high, and it affected the teacher-student ratio and facilities. The average teacher-student ratio was 1:50; thus, classrooms were congested, and learning facilities were limited. The study found that students' performance in FDSS was poor. Many students completed lower and advanced secondary levels with completion certificates, but the quality of the grades with which they passed was poor since only very few students are qualified for further studies. Educators were more interested in the number of students who are able to continue in universities and colleges, rather than the number of those who complete and go back home.

The number was found to be inadequate in day secondary schools. Schools were staffed according to the teachers' working hours and the number of students. However, the 37 hours per week were too many for teachers' effective and efficient teaching. Quality education needed more teachers and fewer working hours than the schools had. The study found that the schools established under FEP lacked teaching materials in terms of students' textbooks and teachers' aids. Limited textbooks were available in lower levels

(Form 1 to 3), but the advanced levels (Form 4 to 6) had no books. However, teaching methods were not significantly affected by the high enrolments. Most of the interactive methods were used by teachers. These included demonstrative, group discussion and question-answer methods. Other effective methods like experimental discovery and role-play were not familiar among teachers; instead lecture method was found to be excessively used.

The study also established that there were no laboratories in day secondary schools. The main reason for their lack was that these schools do not offer science combinations, but schools claimed that they need laboratories even for other students. Libraries were found to be poorly equipped. There were more books for the old curriculum, with very few books for the competence-based curriculum, which is the newly implemented curriculum in Rwanda. It would be good to provide schools with enough resources for this curriculum. In addition, the research found a lack and inadequacy of sport facilities in schools such as playgrounds. However, these facilities were planned in the school budget thus there was hope of providing them as soon as possible.

Schools' funds were also insufficient in day secondary schools. Since free education policy the government was in charge of providing funds to those schools but without parents' participation public funds were not enough and the delay a lot. In addition, parents and government were to cooperate for feeding program but the parents did not respond positively. The study found that total schools' expenditure exceeded total income thus schools struggle to pay the balance of the previous year using some of the funds of the session in progress. This did not allow improvement of other school needs.

5.2.2 Socio-Economic Factors affect the implementation of Free Education Policy

After the Free Education Policy was introduced, the socio-economic factors that influenced the implementation of free education were examined in this study and the findings were as follows:

The study found that some households' (parents') income were little and associated with the high cost of school expensive affect the implementation of the free education policy. Furthermore, some teachers mentioned that parents failing to send their children at school because of failing to afford school necessary and materials for their children as well as the transport. Furthermore, this slows the implementation of the free education policy as parents failed to cooperate with schools, while they are the stakeholders of this policy as well.

5.2.3 Existing Government Mechanisms that promote the Implementation of Free Education Policy

The study findings were of the opinion that the government had made efforts to increase the percentage of implementation of free education in the schools. Some measures that were already taken were as follows:

To some extent, the government built new schools and /or expanded the existing ones by adding classrooms. Teaching materials such as textbooks and computers were also provided, though their numbers were limited. Teachers salary was increased by 10% since the beginning of the 2019 academic year. In addition, the government recruited and trained new teachers, especially in the newly established schools, in order to get enough teachers who will be to this new school in align of free education policy goals.

Again, a portion of the national budget was allocated to funding free secondary schools, with some expected contribution from the parents.

In response to poor and hungry learners, feeding programs were introduced in all FDSS as part of the free education policy, requiring the government-parents' partnership. Unfortunately, parents did not comply with this, and public funds for feeding programs are not significant due to the economic constraints, this cause fail of implementation of this program in some schools. The study found that teachers' complaints about their economic lives were taken care of by opening a Teachers' SACCO (Saving and Credit Cooperative). They can now access the bank credit through this cooperative without as many complications as they used to. Lastly, education services were decentralized to the local administrative levels, hence making it easier for supervisors to coordinate and control school activities and the implementation of the policy.

5.2.4 Challenges Faced by the Government of Rwanda in the Implementation of Free Education Policy

The study investigated the challenges faced by the government in implementing the free education policy. The findings showed that the government of Rwanda encountered the problems of insufficient budget for education, school buildings and other infrastructures, translation of textbooks into English, and high student dropout rates. Therefore, these challenges combined have led to slow and unsuccessful implementation of free education in Bugesera District. Additionally, District Education Officers and some head teachers mentioned that this was manifested in inadequate infrastructure and materials, and a few school buildings, and slowly increase in enrollment and increase in dropout rate, and cost associate school costs.

5.2.5 Suggestions for Alternative Strategies for Free Education Policy Implementation Improvement

The study found that the existing government measures had partially contributed to overcoming the quality education challenges, but much more needed to be done for better improvements. Therefore, alternative strategies for policy implementation and achievement were suggested: There should be sensitizing campaigns for parents' participation in education, especially in free-day secondary schools. Moreover, public education on family relations was suggested in order to reduce the impact of family conflicts on the children. The study suggested the provision of laboratories and dining rooms in day schools. Laboratories would allow students to have more practical experiences in the sciences. Dining rooms would spare classrooms from serving as multipurpose rooms and enhance students' and teachers' comfort in teaching and learning.

Therefore, it was also suggested that the government should provide schools with more textbooks and desks. The CBC needed more students' books since they not only receive from teachers, but they also have to search and build knowledge for themselves. Additional desks would also create a conducive classroom environment for learning. The study again suggested that students' capitation and feeding funds, as well as teachers' salaries, should be increased and timely released in order to allow schools to operate effectively and increase staff motivation.

For the purpose of saving time and suit teachers from other regions, the study suggested that day secondary schools should have affordable teachers' accommodations. The respondents also proposed more teachers' training on CBC. Furthermore, friendly

supervision which seeks teachers' improvement rather than scaring was preferred. For students' emotional and psychological health, the establishment of counselling services in schools was suggested as a possible mean than can enhance their holistic education. Finally, other alternative strategies were stopping automatic promotion, involving teachers in decision-making, collaborating with the entire school community, and safeguarding the stability of the education system in the country.

5.3 Conclusions

Based on the study findings, the following research came up with the following conclusions.

Free education implementation is affected by the following factors, which is sometimes lead to poor quality of education. The government's low budget has led to not being able to provide adequate physical facilities, a lack of teaching materials, a lack of parents' involvement, and insufficient funds from both the government and parents. Furthermore, free education implementation has increased access to secondary education enrolment and completion. However, quality performance was not achieved. Although many students passed through the system, very few got better grades that could allow them to enroll in colleges and universities. Generally, teachers and head teachers were not happy with the students' achievements in day secondary schools because a secondary certificate cannot lead them to a better future.

The head teachers in day secondary schools have heavy administrative duties that make it difficult to properly monitor teachers' work through supervision. However, the study appreciated that, from the district and other top management levels, schools were visited

and assessed regularly, even though teachers considered these visits as unfriendly and demotivating.

Therefore, there was a need for local supervision within the schools and friendly supervision from outside inspectors.

The study concluded that socio-economic and financial factors affected the implementation of the free education policy and achieving their goals. This manifested that there were no laboratories in secondary schools, especially in day secondary schools, while students' textbooks and library equipment were limited. Hence, day schools were in urgent need of these facilities. In addition, sports facilities were also found to be scarce. However, the study found that there was an appreciable use of interactive methods such as group discussion, demonstration, and question-and-answer.

The study concluded that parents' participation in free education policy is poor. They wrongly understood the concept of free education and therefore abandoned their responsibilities, leaving them to the government and teachers. In addition, the surrounding environment was found to affect the implementation of the free education policy and students' learning. For instance, long distances affected punctuality and attendance, while remote areas prevented schools from accessing electricity. Lastly, the study concluded that the government was aware of the challenges and had made some efforts, but not sufficiently to enhance the implementation of the free education policy and education.

5.4 Implication

The study aims to assess the factors influencing the implementation of the free education policy in Bugesera District. Therefore, the findings are of significant importance to the education sector in Bugesera District and to all stakeholders of free education, such as parents, District Education Officers, Teachers, and Head Teachers, as well as the Local Education Council. The findings are important for understanding of the level that free education policy was implemented, as well as the factors that are hindering the success of implementation of free education in Bugesera District.

Furthermore, the findings mentioned there is a lack of information and awareness about free education to the parents and their roles in the implementation of free education, and there is a lack of partnership between the District and public -private partnerships. Therefore, this study suggested that there should be training and teaching for parents to raise awareness about free education so that they can understand their roles. Furthermore, the study suggested that the government/District should engage public private partnership in order to increase the education budget and support as well.

5.5 Recommendations

Following the findings and conclusions of this study, the researcher made these recommendations for improving free education implementation:

However, challenges remain in effectively implementing this policy, particularly in rural areas like Bugesera District. To address these issues, the government, district education officers, head teachers, teachers, and local community leaders should consider the following recommendations:

Firstly, the government should invest in expanding and upgrading school infrastructure to accommodate the growing student population. This includes constructing more classrooms, providing adequate teaching and learning materials, and ensuring that schools have access to essential utilities like clean water and electricity. Furthermore, the government should explore innovative strategies to incentivize teacher recruitment and retention, such as offering better compensation and professional development opportunities, especially in underserved rural areas. (Nyenje & Nkata, 2016)

Secondly, Bugesera District Education Officers should strengthen monitoring and evaluation systems to track the implementation of the free education policy. This includes regularly collecting and analyzing data on school enrollment, attendance, and dropout rates, as well as the availability of learning resources and the quality of instruction. By identifying and addressing bottlenecks in the system, the district can ensure that the free education policy is reaching all children, especially those from marginalized communities.

Head teachers and teachers play a crucial role in fostering a conducive learning environment and promoting student engagement. They should be provided with regular training on effective teaching methods, including the use of technology-aided, activity-based learning approaches that have been shown to improve learning outcomes (Hoop et al., 2023). Additionally, head teachers should establish robust communication channels with parents and the local community to raise awareness about the importance of education and encourage active participation in school affairs.

Finally, local community leaders and parents should be actively involved in the implementation of the free education policy. They can work closely with schools to

identify and address barriers to access, such as long distances to schools, lack of transportation, and household poverty. Community-based initiatives, such as establishing school feeding programs and providing financial assistance to needy families, can go a long way in ensuring that all children in Bugesera District can benefit from the free education policy.

5.5.1 Strengthening Infrastructure and Resources

i. The research found that the most challenging factor affecting the implementation of free education is financial and economic factors, such as low education budget; therefore, the study recommends that the government and district engage NGO's and collaborate so that they can fund and support the schools.

ii. Various means should be used by the government to improve. The researcher proposed that the government increase funds for the education sector and release them at the beginning of every trimester. In order to get these funds, the government might make investors and donors interested in education as a basis for national and sustainable development.

iii. The study recommended that the education officials to set out and explain clearly to the population the meaning they put under „Free Education“ and what contribution they expect from parents. This would remove some ambiguities and misunderstandings between the government and parents, so that it can improve and speed up the implementation of policy and achieve its target goals.

vi. The whole community surrounding the schools (parents, teachers, local authorities, and community residents at large) should together come up with mechanisms that make

the neighborhood understand their participation in enhancing the implementation of the free education policy. Participating in the building of classrooms during community work (Umuganda) every last Saturday of the month, which will increase the number of different schools, hence accommodating more students.

The study revealed that the parents are not participating in or committed to the free education policy, which hinders free education from being successful. Therefore, the research recommends that the local education councils, together with head teachers, educate and raise awareness of the advantages of free education so that parents can be engaged in the policy implementation.

vii. The study revealed the urgency of guidance and counselling departments in day secondary schools in order to improve students' emotional and psychological wellness. The researcher recommended that the government establish these departments in schools. For immediate action, teaching staff empowerment in counselling skills must be undertaken to have professionals capable of handling some students' problems. In addition, parents should also be equipped with knowledge about adolescents' education since the follow-up of their behaviors is also done at home.

Viii. Finally, the study recommended that the government should make efforts to prepare and establish a well-structured and well-reflected education system that would resist major changes that affect free education and enhance stability.

5.6 Suggestions for Further Studies

The findings of this study raise the need for further research that can be carried out in order to find ways of promoting and sustaining quality education. The following are suggestions made on areas that require focus:

- i.** Similar studies should be conducted in other provinces to check if there are other factors affecting or slowing down the implementation of the free education policy.
- ii.** Further research should be conducted on quality education in high schools to assess the impacts of free education on the quality of education.
- iii.** Further research should be carried out to find if there is a relationship between the factors affecting the quality of education in day secondary schools and boarding schools.

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APPENDICES

Appendix a: Informed Consent

My name is Arsen Nsengimana, a student at Africa University pursuing a master's degree in public policy and governance. I am carrying out a study on the factors influencing the implementation of the free education policy. Case study of Bugesera District. I am inviting you to participate in this study by providing the information that I believe you have the capacity and skill to answer.

What you should know about the study:

Purpose of the study:

You are invited to participate in a research study that seeks to assess factors influencing the implementation of the free education policy, particularly in Bugesera District, Rwanda. This study will take place in Bugesera District high schools. The research questions will assist in understanding the situation of the free education policy implementation and its level of success or implementation. The study is targeted at 9 schools.

Procedures and duration:

If you decide to participate, you are required to answer interview questions/ fill in the questionnaire. It is expected that this will take about 15-20 minutes. But in the case of a focus group discussion, it will take a maximum of 30 minutes

Risks and discomforts:

As far as this study is concerned, there are no risks or any discomfort that is associated with it either directly or indirectly.

Benefits and/or compensation:

There are neither benefits nor compensations associated with this study. As a participant, you are invited to take part voluntarily, as this research is aimed at unravelling the situation concerning the implementation of the free education policy and using the information gathered for public awareness and improvement of policy implementation. It is therefore advised that one participate in a personal capacity without expectation of any material benefit.

Confidentiality

This research shall keep the information obtained in the study that can be identified with the participant confidential and shall not be disclosed without their permission. Names will not be required on the questionnaires and interviews, as only the initials of the

Teacher number Local education council Students	
Age of Participant	18-26 <input type="checkbox"/> 27-35 <input type="checkbox"/> 36-44 <input type="checkbox"/> ≥ 45 <input type="checkbox"/>
Gender of Farmer: Male <input type="checkbox"/> Female <input type="checkbox"/>	

2. Are you a permanent resident in Bugesera District? Yes No

Which education level did you reach?

Primary Secondary Tertiary

3. Number of years served

How many years have you been in the education sector?	
≤ 1	
1– 2	
2 – 3	
3 – 4	
4 – 5	
5 – 6	
≥ 6	

4. Are you aware of the Free Education Policy? Yes No
5. Are there enough schools available in Bugesera to accommodate all children eligible for free education?
6. What factors do you think influence enrollment rates among children in Bugesera District?
7. Which factor affected the effectiveness of the free education policy implementation in Bugesera District? **Please fill in the table below (tick your answers).**

Factors affected the effectiveness of the free education policy	Percentage
Distance or geographical location of the school	
Income or family income	
Social-cultural	
Socio-economic	
Political issues	
Financial capacity	
Resource Allocation	

8. Do you find it challenging to implement all the free education policy in Bugesera District?
- Yes No

9. If your answer above is YES, how has it been challenging?

10. How has the free education policy impacted families economically in Bugesera District?

11. Are there any hidden costs associated with sending children to school that families still face despite the free education initiative?

12. In what ways do economic conditions influence children's ability to attend school regularly?

13. For the different levels of education, how their accessible after the implementation of free education policy? Please **fill in the table below.**

Accessibility percentage after the free education policy was	Primary	High School	Tertiary

implemented			
20			
40			
60			
80			
100			

14. Has the Free Education Policy improved or declined education quality over the past five years, in Bugesera District? **Please fill in the table below.**

Level of Education	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
Primary					
High school					
Tertiary					

15. Besides the improvement or decline in education quality are there any other benefits you have observed from the implemented and practicing free education policy in Bugesera district? **Please fill in the table below.**

Observed the education sector before free education policy in Bugesera District	Observed the education sector After free education policy in Bugesera District

THANK YOU FOR YOUR PARTICIPATION

Appendix c: AUREC Approval Form



AFRICA UNIVERSITY
A Continent Reborn, A Nation's Promise

"Investing in Africa's future"

AFRICA UNIVERSITY RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE (AUREC)

P.O. Box 1320 Mutare, Zimbabwe, Off Nyanga Road, Old Mutare-Tel (+263-20) 60075/60026/61611 Fax: (+263 20) 61785 Website: www.africau.edu

Ref: AU3533/26

24 March, 2026

ARSEN NSENGIMANA

C/O Africa University

Box 1320

MUTARE

RE: ASSESSING FACTORS INFLUENCING THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE FREE EDUCATION POLICY IN BUGESERA DISTRICT, RWANDA

Thank you for submitting the above-titled proposal to the Africa University Research Ethics Committee for review. Please be advised that AUREC has reviewed and approved your application to conduct the above research.

The approval is based on the following.

a) Research proposal

- **APPROVAL NUMBER** AUREC 3533/26
This number should be used on all correspondence, consent forms, and appropriate documents
- **AUREC MEETING DATE** NA
- **APPROVAL DATE** March 24, 2026
- **EXPIRATION DATE** March 24, 2027
- **TYPE OF MEETING:** Expedited

After the expiration date, this research may only continue upon renewal. A progress report on a standard AUREC form should be submitted a month before the expiration date for renewal purposes.

- **SERIOUS ADVERSE EVENTS** All serious problems concerning subject safety must be reported to AUREC within 3 working days on the standard AUREC form.
- **MODIFICATIONS** Prior AUREC approval is required before implementing any changes in the proposal (including changes in the consent documents)
- **TERMINATION OF STUDY** Upon termination of the study a report has to be submitted to AUREC.



Yours Faithfully

MARY CHINZOU

FOR CHAIRPERSON

AFRICA UNIVERSITY RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE

Appendix d: Bugesera District Research Permission Letter



Bugesera District, Eastern
Province, Rwanda
P.O. Box 4062 Kigali, RWANDA
info@bugesera.gov.rw

25 September 2024

To Whom It May Concern

RE: Arsen Nsengimana

This serves to confirm that Arsen Nsengimana, a Rwanda student from Africa University in Zimbabwe in Master of Public Policy and Governance has been permitted to carryout his research project for masters' degree in education sectors in the particular schools in Bugesera District, Eastern Province, Rwanda.

The use of the data from this research is permitted for use by Arsen Nsengimana for any project that he requires it for.

Yours faithfully,

Jacques Gashumba
Director of Education
Cell: +250 788 261 177