



## **Fee Free Education on Standard Four National Assessments: Effects and Coping Strategies in Selected Public Primary Schools in Dodoma City Council-Tanzania**

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### **ABSTRACT**

### **Article info**

*Tanzania reintroduced fee-free education policy to provide opportunities for all school-age-going children to attend primary school education. However, fee-free education in Tanzania exponentially increased enrolments in primary schools beyond the resources offered by the government. This implies that the student's performance is likely to be negatively affected and thus the aim of fee-free education. Extant studies and government reports reveal that despite the shortages of school resources due to FFE, some public primary schools still performed better in the Standard Four National Assessment (SFNA). Therefore, this study examined coping strategies for SFNA in 10 selected public primary schools in Dodoma City Council. The study employed a qualitative approach, case study design and purposive and simple random sampling techniques. The findings reveal that despite scarce resources the performance continued to improve to up to 90 per cent pass rate. This is because of the coping strategies employed by the teachers including teaching extra time, teaching before 8:00 am and from 2:30 pm to 5:00 pm, and the provision of meals which enabled schools to extend school timetables for Standard Four students to 5:00 pm. Saturdays were used for administering tests and corrections of class exercises. These coping strategies however had financial implications such as the recruitment of part-time teachers. Furthermore, teachers coping strategies cannot work better in all local government authorities because of the existence of differences in contexts, therefore, the government may expand the allocation of resources equivalent to the enrolment of pupils. The study employed a qualitative approach and case study design.*

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## 1. Introduction

According to the United Nations (UN, 2022), primary and secondary education is the base for the social, political as well as economic development of any country towards achieving sustainable development goals (SDGs) by 2030. As such, governments around the world jointly and independently have dedicated efforts to improving the quality of education for life transformation and sustainable development (UNESCO, 2022). The trail of concerted efforts of all nations for quality and equitable education around the world demonstrates that in 1990, Jomtien Thailand aimed at fee-free Primary Education for all children in all Countries (UNESCO, 1990). In 2005, the UNICEF and the World Bank introduced School Fees Abolition Initiatives (SFAI) to enable all primary school-going age children enrolment to reach 100 per cent by 2015 (Koffi et al, 2015). In 2015, the United Nations launched Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Specifically, goal number 4 insists on fee-free education and equitable and quality education in primary schools by 2030 (UN, 2015). However, all these efforts resulted in rising in the global enrolment average to 102.81 per cent in 2018 above the Universal target of 100 per cent (UNESCO, 2018). While global enrolments surpassed 100 per cent, academic performances were as follows: America and Europe 99 per cent, Latin America and the Caribbean 91 per cent, Eastern and South Asia, and Central and Southern Asia 85 per cent, Oceania 94 per cent, and Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) 67 per cent. SSA needed 28 years more to achieve Universal Primary Education (UNESCO, 2022). This implies that it would be very difficult for SSA to eradicate poverty, diseases and illiteracy by 2030.

The Government of the United Republic of Tanzania (URT) launched several initiatives to attain primary education for all children. For instance, two Education Programmes Primary Education Development Programmes PEDPs I and II from 2002 to 2006 and 2007 to 2011 respectively (HakiElimu, 2014). The FFE resulted in an increase in pupils' enrolment from 4,842,875 in 2001 to 7,959,884 in 2006, gross school enrolment ration (GER) and net school enrolment ratio (NER) also increased from 84 and 65.5 per cent in 2001 to 112.7 per cent and 96.1 per cent respectively in 2006 (PEDP-I Report, 2007). The government does allocate resources for primary school education. Even in 2023/2024, the government increased the budget by TZS 399.64 billion (15.34%) from TZS 346.46 billion (Xhinua, 2023). Nevertheless, the high increase in demand for Book-Pupil Ratio (BPR) reached 1:6 against 1:3; Pupils Teacher Ratio was 1:52 against 1:40 (Ibid). Almost all resources were under extreme pressure, which resulted in inadequate academic performance in some primary schools. According to 2013 national assessment-learning objectives in Tanzania for Standard Three using Early Grade Reading Assessment (EGRA), and Early Grade Mathematics Assessments (EGMA) ability in reading Kiswahili and English from 200 primary schools in 20 districts revealed that 40 per cent of pupils scored zero on comprehension and 90 per cent were not able to read the English language with confidence. Despite the challenges of scarcity of schools' resources, some public primary schools increased performance. For example, the National Primary School examinations performance demonstrated the following trend by year

and percentage in brackets: in 2002 (67.5%), 2003 (88.7%), 2004 (85.9%), 2005 (87.85%) and 2006 (79.8%) (PEDP I Report URT, 2007). The increase in enrolments due to fee-free primary education in Tanzania had a positive effect on the performance of all schools.

For further ingenuity to attain education for all in primary schools in Tanzania, the government issued three circulars in November 2015, December 2015 and May 2016 (URT, 2016). These circulars resulted in the rise of the enrolment rate to 1,531,746 pupils in 2015 compared to 2,120,666 in 2016 (HakiElimu 2017). During this time, fee-free education also resulted in teacher to pupil ratio of 1:164 in Standard One. In 2017, TPR was 1:56 against the NBS (2020) recommended ratio of 1:45. In 2018, Standard I to Standard III textbook-pupil's ratio was 1:7 against the recommended ratio of 1:1 (URT, 2018). According to Education Sector Performance Report (2019), pupils to teacher ratio was 1:54 and Pupils to Qualified Teacher Ratio (PQTR) was 1:59 against the recommended ratio of 1:45 (URT, 2018). Statistics validate overstretched available resources far beyond the optimum level of utilization in Tanzania due to fee-free education for high primary school pupils' enrolment. The reports (i.e., URT, 2018, Schiefelbein and Ferrel (1973); Eshiwani (1986); Abagi (1997) and Ongeti (2005) reveal a high shortage of school resources that could ultimately result in inadequate public primary schools' National Examinations performance. Despite the shortage of resources, high students' enrolment rate in schools due to fee-free education as indicated in some reports (i.e., Soigi, 2018; Wanjala, 2018, MoEST, 2019, NECTA, 2021) showed that fee-free education did not affect academic performance in some schools. It seems some schools devised adequate coping strategies as a result of fee-free education policy in Tanzania.

Empirical studies (e.g., Sifuna, 2006; URT, 2014; Godda, 2018; Mwakalukwa, 2019; Akbour et al., 2015) that covered several issues on fee-free education in Public Primary and secondary schools in Tanzania found that the fee-free policy implementation resulted in high shortages of schools' resources (i.e., teachers, classrooms, books, desks etc.). However, a few reports (i.e., Soigi, 2018; Wanjala, 2018; MoEST, 2019; NECTA, 2021) reveal that despite shortages of schools' resources, some public primary schools performed better in their Standard Four National Examinations (SFNA). From the reviewed empirical studies, it is apparent that such studies addressed issues on coping strategies for fee-free education on SFNA performance in public primary schools. Therefore, the current study examined the effects and coping strategies employed by teachers on SFNA in selected public primary schools in Dodoma City Council.

## **2. Coping Strategies for Fee-Free Education**

One of the approaches for improving schools' performance is coping strategies for constrained scarce resources. Some of the coping strategies primary school teachers used are embarking on stakeholders such as community participation. In Singida, the community provided some resources such as food to support students undertake extra classes in the evening (Godda, 2018).

The FFEP strategy was reported to improve learning by making pupils strong throughout the day. In other countries, teachers apply a similar approach. For example, Akbour *et al.*, (2015) show that due to FFE in Ghana, community participation resulted in the provision of lunch in schools. The provision of food makes teachers and pupils energetic and creates ample time for students and teachers to concentrate on academic activities. Teaching and learning processes become ineffective when starving pupils and teachers attend long class sessions without food (Daniel, 2020; Mulinya and Orodho, 2015). The Education and Training Policy of Tanzania- 2014 categorically underlines the provision of food and other basic needs as very important for the good performance of the pupils in schools. However, this has been documented as one of the most challenges facing primary schools (Daniel, 2020; World Bank, 2009). While in theory, inadequate resources would result in poor academic performance, SFNA, Mates (2016) and NECTA (2021) reveal the opposite. Some schools in the Dodoma region had excellent performance.

Godda (2018), Wanjiku *et al.*, (2017) and Mlawa (2017) demonstrate that the provision of food was one of the coping strategies for implementing FFEP in schools in Tanzania. The provision of food by the community to pupils in the school has become instrumental in teaching and learning. It makes all pupils, irrespective of their economic background afford lunches, get food at the same time and amount, and presumably enough for all pupils. However, according to the Citizen (April 2021), in the Mbeya region, some parents and community members were reluctant to support schools' food and classroom construction programmes. They misconceived the fee-free education policy as undermining parents' roles in education (Ibid). Additionally, Bray (1996) maintains that the poor are more profoundly affected by direct costs and opportunity costs hence they need support the most. With this conception, the community may not easily support teachers in implementing coping strategies for SNFA. Irrespective that some costs are to be covered by the governments, the role of parents in their children's education is irreplaceable (World Bank, 2009).

In other places in Tanzania, Street level bureaucrats used several coping strategies to deal with the real situation after introducing a fee-free education programme. A study by Mwakalukwa (2019) reveals the coping strategies employed in Morogoro Municipal public secondary schools. Due to inadequate textbooks, teachers applied photocopying books and some parts of books to facilitate teaching-learning processes in class. However, this approach could raise copyright issues. The

parents and guardians were in favour of the coping strategy and provided their support in cash and materials. They further supported the construction of classrooms, which could reduce pupils' congestion in a few available classrooms. The coping strategy may not be replicated easily in poor communities; as suggested by the World Bank (2009) poor community members are reluctant and sensitive to direct charges on education.

The exponential increase of the pupils and students in schools after the introduction of FFE resulted in a shortage of basic resources; in particular classrooms. One of the coping strategies for the scarcity of classrooms was the extension of time for studying in school. The only time extended was evenings from Monday to Friday and Saturdays. In the evenings and Saturdays, the pupils in the National Examinations classes could use classrooms (Wambui, 2013; Mlawa, 2017). Large classes could be divided into two groups for morning and evening sessions. This created a double shift, but it resolved problems related to the shortage of classrooms, desks and teachers. Additionally, schools had discretions to engaging part-time and volunteer teachers to shoulder the heavy workload in schools in Singida (Mlawa, 2017). As revealed by the World Bank (2009), the enrolment surge could result in multiple shifts in education whereby the teacher can devise coping strategies and mechanisms that include but are not limited to dividing pupils into morning and afternoon group sessions and using space in sessions, and church facilities and recruiting untrained teachers.

Wambui (2013)'s study shows that teachers in Kenya after FFE in 2003 found that head teachers introduced extra time class sessions due to the scarcity of classrooms. Saturday's classes helped schools to get good performance in Kenya. Similar strategies were used in Tanzania. For example, Mlawa (2017) shows that in the Ikungi District of the Singida region, teachers used double shifts (dividing pupils into morning and evening sessions). As this was the best strategy to deal with the problem of classrooms, desks and teachers. Part-time and volunteer teachers were used in Dodoma. Similar findings in other studies (i.e., Mutereko, 2009; Simatwa et al., 2010; Akbour et al., 2015) show that the strategy helped to bridge the gap of the scarcity of teachers caused by FFPEP. Part-time teachers were paid with money contributed by parents. A study by Akbour et al, (2015) shows that due to FFE in Ghana, community participation resulted in the provision of lunch in schools. Accordingly, Sifuna (2007), Wanjiku et al., (2017) and Mlawa

(2017) revealed that the community is very important in supporting the strategies employed by the schools by providing food and money.

### **3. Theoretical Framework**

Lipsky (1980) proposes the concept of Street Level Bureaucrats. According to Lipsky (Ibid), street-level bureaucrats are front-line workers and are public servants that have direct interaction with citizens when performing their daily routine duties in implementing government policies (Zouridis et al., 2002). Street Level Bureaucrats include but are not limited to Police Officers, nurses, doctors and teachers who implement laws, regulations and policy decisions from the public administrators. In this study, Street Level Bureaucrats are teachers and other Education Officers because they interact directly with pupils in schools in the implementation of FFE policies. In Lipsky (1980)'s conception, teachers and Education Officers implement the same policy differently due to compounded factors mainly community participation; discretion; sharing experience; autonomy; and environment.

Because of difficult regulations and policies made by the top administration, teachers and Education Officers would adopt strategies, which help them to implement the policy (Brodkin, 2012). In the context of this study, teachers adapt coping strategies to ensure that pupils pass tests, assessments and examinations (Zouridis et al., 2002). Teachers and Education Officers set the rules that shape the behaviours of clients, occupations and organizations (May et al., 2007). Teachers and Education Officers face various demands from their environment after the administrators formulate policies that have a mismatch between resources and the demands, which they conceptualized as a public service gap (Thoman (2015).

Additionally, Lipsky (1980) opines that, policymakers do not consider the professional ethical values of teachers, and Education Officers in implementing the formulated policies and laws since professional ethical values shape professional workers to conduct their duties based upon what teachers and Education Officers decide on how to manage their work. Street-level bureaucrats have freedom of action (Brodkin, 2012). They can design better ways of doing their work, judge and make clear decisions but do not make decisions as machine operators (Mutereko, 2009). The basis of the dilemma of teachers and Education Officers is that they are present to help people or make decisions about them based on individual cases (Lipsky, 1980). However, according to the

structure of their job, it is difficult for teachers and Education Officers to make decisions because orders come from above, that is, the top management (Brodkin, 2012). Therefore, teachers and Education Officers devise coping strategies (Mutereko, 2009). While coping with the pressure of their work, teachers and Education Officers use different coping mechanisms such as promoting pupils to the next grade by looking at previous teachers' judgments in their informal assignments (Lipsky, 1980). Referrals also are used by teachers to cope with the challenges of their work whereby heads of schools would look for teachers who have enough experiences to handle the clients (pupils) who are in difficult situations (Lipsky, 1980).

Community participation is the main factor for teachers' and Education Officers' success. Through using coping strategies, a school can build classrooms and contribute cash. Heads of schools can get support from stakeholders who can buy textbooks and contribute food to support pupils to attend remedial lessons in the evenings and Saturdays. This is done at the discretion of teachers that implement policies that would otherwise have been very difficult to implement (Zouridis, et al., 2002). This shows that teachers find ways of managing their work and exercise freedom of how to judge and make clear decisions which enable them to adopt strategies that help them in implementing the policy.

Sharing experience also is an important ingredient for teachers and Education Officers. Teachers have different work experiences according to age and seniority in performing their daily routine during the implementation of Government Policies (Mutereko, 2009). Senior teachers mentor junior teachers. This also applies to sharing experiences among schools whose performance is either better or poor. Experiences may be double shifts, extra school study, provision of lunch for examination classes, and creaming such as choosing the first learners' pupils and teaching them more.

Places such as urban areas where many institutions are found receive aid from such institutions including desks, building classrooms, books, part-time teachers and remedial classes. However, in some areas the introduction and implementation of such strategies become difficult. For example, extra study is easy for town schools but difficult in rural areas schools due to proximity to the school and transport facilities. Therefore, teachers use coping strategies to deal with high pupil

enrolment in Public Primary schools that exert tremendous pressure on resources, specifically classrooms, manpower, desks and learning materials.

Critics opine that the autonomy and discretion of teachers to cope with the pressure of their work sometimes could favour some clients or pupils. Teachers favour fast learners and ignore slow learners. Also, environments such as urban or rural areas favour some schools to have good schools' performance than others. Unfortunately, street-level bureaucrats are not well prepared to cope with the emerging challenges of the implementation of the free education policy. Thus, letting them apply their autonomy and discretion in coping with the challenges of free education implementation may be problematic. Despite some weaknesses, the theory provides a comprehensive analytical framework for explaining the implementation of FFE without compromising the performance of primary school pupils.

#### **4. Methods and Materials**

This study used a qualitative approach. The qualitative research approach involved different types of data collection and analysis. In this study, the researchers created rapport with respondents to provide precise information concerning the study. The approach allowed the researchers to be close to the participants while gathering information. Data collection was done through interviews, questionnaires, documentary review and observations and a combination of methods was used for the interpretation and analysis of information. The qualitative approach was also important. The researchers collected information by looking at the natural environment of what existed in the area. The study employed a case study research design. The case study design was the best as it enabled an intensive and detailed examination of the phenomena under study. The researchers used a cross-sectional design which allowed them to visit ten Public Primary Schools in Dodoma City Council within a short time and collected intensive and detailed information about the effects and coping strategies for Fee-Free Education regarding Standard Four Examinations' Performance in selected Public Primary Schools in Dodoma City Council. Moreover, the qualitative design enabled the researchers to identify coping strategies that were used by teachers to deal with the problem of inadequate school resources in Dodoma City public primary schools.

In semi-structured interviews, the first question asked was; whether were there enough school resources after the introduction of FFE. The question was meant to understand whether there were adequate ratios of teachers to pupils, pupils to classrooms, pupils to desks and pupils to books after the introduction of FFE as per the Tanzania Education Policy of 2014. The second question was what were the effects of FFE on Standard Four National Assessments schools' performance for 2020 in Dodoma city public primary schools? This question was meant to identify whether there was good or poor SFNA examination performance. The third question was, what strategies did teachers use to attain good Standard Four National Assessment schools' performance in Dodoma city public primary schools for 2020? This is because the NECTA report of 2021 has shown that Dodoma City Council attained better examination performance than other districts. This question was meant to identify the coping strategies which were used to maintain good SFNA performance despite the scarcity of school resources as a result of FFE. Seventy-one (71) respondents including one (1) DEO, ten (10) SCCs, ten (10) HTs, and (50) pupils 5 from each school were involved. The researcher used a Semi-structured guide list of questions; Kiswahili was used during interview sessions but the researchers transcribed and translated all responses into English. The questionnaire was administered to capture more information from diverse primary school Standard One-class teachers, Standard Four teachers and academic teachers from ten public primary schools who were closely implementing FFE Policy since its inception. The following information was drawn from each category of participants.

The documentary review was applied to obtain information from Dodoma City Primary Education Offices and Heads of Schools. The documents included the Education Policy of 2014, pupils' class attendance books and NECTA reports for 2017; 2018; 2019; and 2020. With the aid of a Camera, the researcher captured information on the number of pupils in class (i.e., congested or not), resources available (desks, tables, chairs and the like)

As for ethical issues, Dodoma City Council granted permission to conduct the research. The respondents consented to participate and were informed of their rights to withdraw unconditionally at any time before the completion of this study. Additionally, the respondents' rights to privacy and confidentiality of their information were observed throughout the

presentation of the findings. Lastly, to avoid plagiarism, all kinds of information from other sources incorporated in this study were acknowledged properly.

For the validity of the study, the experts in this area examined data collection tools. The study is valid because the information was gathered from key implementers of Fee Free Education Policy in Dodoma City Council public primary schools such as the District Education Officer; school Committee Chairmen, Heads of schools and teachers. Additionally, data collection tools were subjected to pilot testing to confirm the ability of the tools to capture the desired data.

On the reliability of the data, the researchers used a triangulation method whereby interviews, observation, documentary review and questionnaires were used to give convergence of facts during the data collection process. All tools for data collection were pre-tested and given to experts to assess their suitability to the targeted key information. Through these methods, the data obtained are reliable because the findings have revealed that in all ten public primary schools under which this study was done, FFE has caused a scarcity of teachers, classrooms, books and desks.

To analyse data, the study applied a thematic approach for qualitative data, which were collected through interviews, observation, documentary review and open-ended questions using questionnaires. However, there were variations in data analysis according to their sources of data. The major approach was the content analysis for the responses obtained from the tools cited in this section. In all data, the pre-established and emerging themes provided the basis of analysis as presented in Section Five. The analysis started with data coding, followed by data entry, data processing and storing the output of the processed information. Descriptive statistics were presented by using graphs and charts. Furthermore, pictures were taken and analysed as shown in Section Five.

## **5. The results**

This study examined the coping strategies for Standard Four National assessment in selected public primary schools in Dodoma City Council. The interviews, documentary review and observation formed the foundations of the findings in this article as presented in the subsequent sections.

### **5.1 Effects of FFE on SFNA Performance**

One of the objectives of the study was to find the effect of FFE on SFNA performance in selected primary schools in Dodoma City. Findings below show that the exponential increase of pupils enrolled overwhelmed almost all school resources as one of the respondents revealed,

The introduction of FFPEP resulted in the scarcity of books in my school. For example, in the year 2021, the demand for books in our school is 675 and the available books are 338 we have a deficit of 337 books due to an increase in pupils' enrolment. This deficit led to slowing the speed of pupils' ability to learn easily and understand (An interview with the Head Teacher of school C was held on 12th March 2021).

A documentary review was one of the methods which were used to review the availability of school resources in ten selected public primary schools in Dodoma City. Therefore, the document review revealed that there was a deficit in classrooms, teachers, books, and desks in both categories as shown in Table 4.1.

*Table 4.1: Schools Resources*

Schools' Resources	School A N=780		School B N=829		School C N=2025		School D N=1567		School E N=853		School F N= 2,162		School G N=2,005		School H N=1,168		School I N=664		School J N=658	
	A	R	A	R	A	R	A	R	A	R	A	R	A	R	A	R	A	R	A	R
Classrooms	12	1:65	12	1:69	13	1:55	28	01:56	15	01:57	15	1:144	21	1:96	9	1:130	15	01:44	15	01:44
Teachers	23	01:35	25	01:33	38	01:53	30	01:52	13	0:09	42	01:52	25	1:80	24	01:49	17	01:39	23	01:28
Books	130	01:06	138	01:06	338	01:06	261	01:06	213	01:04	541	01:04	201	01:10	234	01:05	133	01:05	132	01:05
Desks	260	01:03	166	01:05	405	01:05	313	01:05	200	01:04	352	01:06	334	01:06	245	01:05	203	01:03	165	01:04

**Source:** Field data (2021) Key: A=Available; R= Ratio; N=Total pupils

The above findings were confirmed by the observations of books in class, and the number of pupils in each class as indicated in Figures 4.4 and 4.5. The graphic evidence triangulated the shortage of resources in schools and in particular during teaching-learning sessions in classrooms.

## 5.2 Effects of FFE on SFNA in 2020 in Dodoma City Council Schools

Findings show that in Dodoma City Council, the implementation of FFE did not negatively affect the results of SFNA in public primary schools. There was SFNA improvement as the District Education Officer declared,

In our district, Public primary schools did not have poor performance for SFNA. In 2020, all public primary schools performed well. Each school scored over 90 per cent in 2020 SFNA. This trend has been the same for all years since 2016 during the introduction of FFE to 2020. There is no difference in schools' performance before and after FFPEP (An Interview with DEO was held on 16<sup>th</sup> March 2020).

The Head of School D made similar observations on the effects of FFE on SFNA performance as follows regarding the results of SFNA in 2020,

Despite overstretched resources, in 2020 except for two students (0.1%) out of 185 equivalents to four streams (classes), the school performance in SFNA was 99 per cent (an interview with the Head Teacher of school D was held on 15th March 2021).

Table 5.2: SFNA schools' performance from 2015 to 2020

SFNA reports	School F		School G			School H			School I			School J			
	P	F	%	P	F	%	P	F	%	P	F	%	P	F	%
2015	90	0	100%	99	17	85%	93	9	91%	82	0	100%	83	1	99%
2016	102	1	99%	197	14	93%	106	4	96%	77	0	100%	82	1	99%
2017	156	4	98%	170	4	98%	77	0	100%	81	0	100%	72	1	99%
2018	153	4	97.5%	147	2	99%	92	0	100%	79	0	100%	70	0	100%
2019	213	10	95.5%	211	9	96%	138	10	93%	96	0	100%	89	1	99%
2020	222	13	95%	340	15	96%	128	9	93%	108	1	99%	73	1	99%

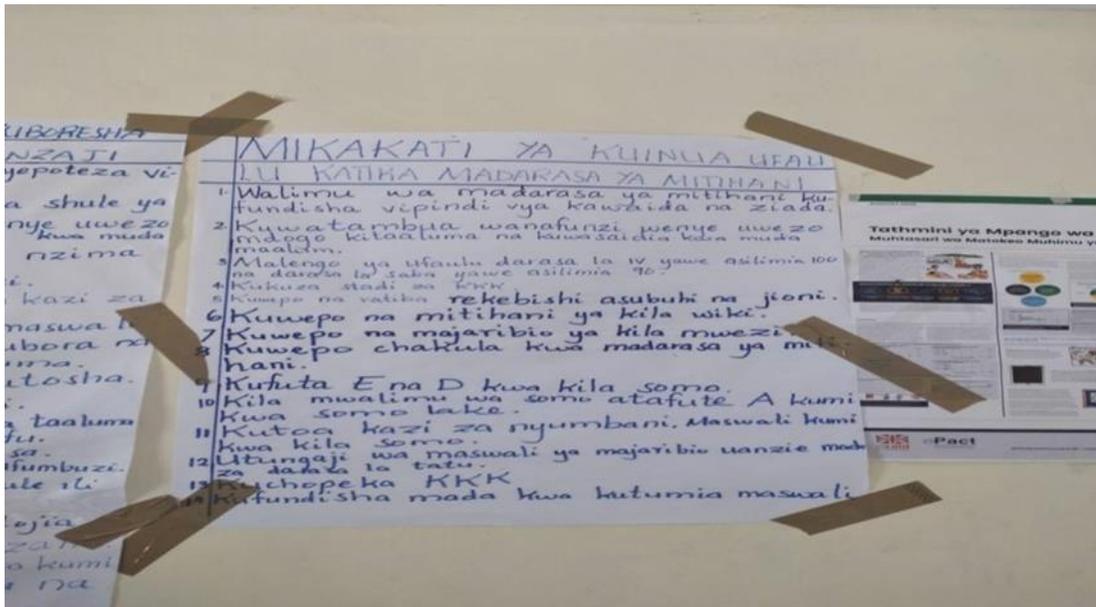
**Source:** Field data (2021) Key: P= Passed exams F= Failed the exams %= Percentages scored

#### 5.4 Early Morning and Evening teaching class sessions

The findings have revealed that one of the strategies employed by all teachers in ten schools under this study was the introduction of Morning Session classes and Evening Classes for Standard Four Pupils. This was reported to help to raise SFNA School Performance in Dodoma City Public Primary Schools. An interview with Head Teacher revealed the following,

In our school, we have introduced early morning teaching apart from the normal timetable for Standard Four. Normal class teaching begins at 8:00 am up to 2:30 pm. Since classrooms are congested and desks are not enough, we decided to begin early teaching and enter the class and teach Standard Four from 7:00 am to 8:00 am before and after normal class teaching from 2:30 to 5:00 pm. During this time, classes were vacant and ready for any activity. We use that opportunity to teach Standard Four pupils and this strategy has helped pupils to perform well and enabled the school to have good SFNA performance (an interview with the Head Teacher of the school I held on 10<sup>th</sup> March 2021).

Figure 5.4. Strategy 5. Showing Early Morning and Evening teaching class sessions



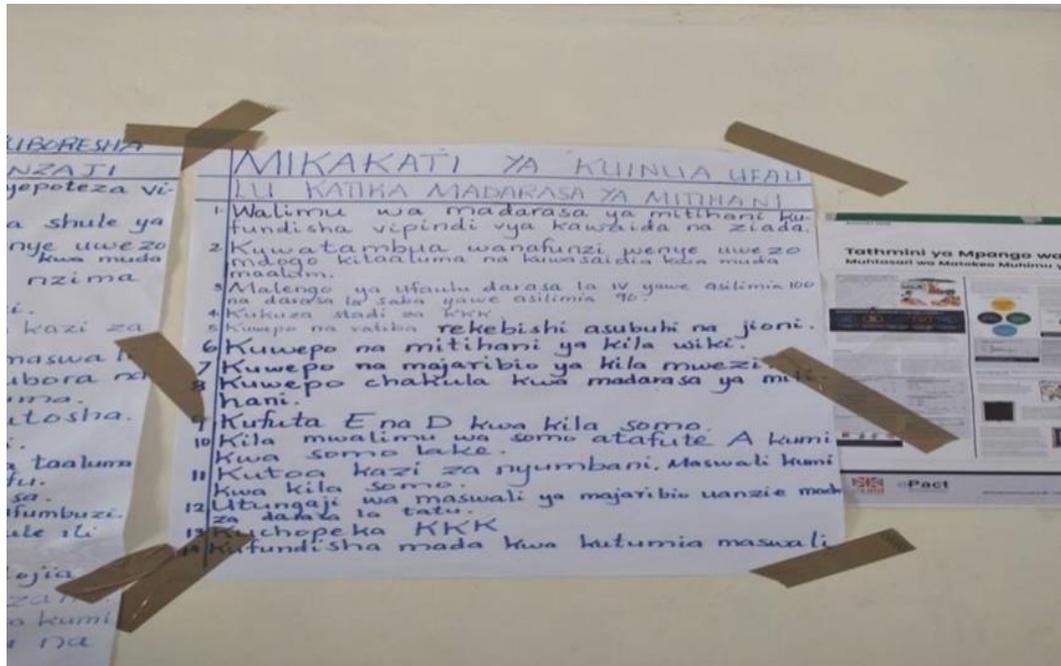
Source: Field data (15<sup>th</sup> March 2021)

### 5.5 Teaching Every Saturday

A teacher in school F had this to say about this coping strategy,

I teach Standard Four classes every Saturday and I give them tests and make corrections because, in a normal class hour on working days, it is hard to provide tests because pupils cannot sit due to congestion in the classrooms and scarcity of desks. We have introduced Saturday class sessions to cope with the problem of scarcity of resources. Therefore, this strategy helps candidates in Standard Four classes (An interview with a Standard Four teacher of school F, which was held on 16<sup>th</sup> March 2021).

Figure 5.5 Strategy 6. Showing Teaching every Saturday



Source: Field data (15<sup>th</sup> March 2021)

### 5.6 Lunch provision at school for Standard Four pupils

The research finding revealed that the strategy used by all teachers in ten schools under which this study was conducted to raise SFNA School Performance in Dodoma City Public Primary Schools was the provision of lunch at school for Standard Four pupils. The Headteacher at school F had this to say,

The school committee decided to involve parents for examination classes to contribute cash or food to provide lunch to Standard Four pupils at the school. This was meant to help pupils study during evening sessions. We used this time to teach Standard Four pupils to cope with the problem of scarcity of school resources and in fact, the strategy resulted in good SFNA school performance in this district in 2020 (an interview with the Head Teacher of the school I, which was held on 16th March 2021).

Getting food is one of the crucial factors influencing students' performance in primary school. Starving pupils cannot enjoy studying. Findings in Figure 4.3.1 show Standard Four students being served lunch at school E.

*Figure: 5.6 Standard Four Pupils during Lunch in School E*



**Source:** Field data (15<sup>th</sup> March 2021)

### **5.7 Teaching by combining all students in the same class**

Teachers were not enough due to FFPEP. A few available teachers had to devise some coping strategies for maintaining and even improving students' performance. One of the strategies was teaching all students in the same class as shown in Figure 4.4.1, as one of the teachers explained.

I used a strategy of teaching pupils by putting them in the same class, forming groups and assigning them exercises, to do in groups, and later every pupil was required to write on his or her exercise book. Therefore, this strategy helped many pupils to improve their ability to read, write and do arithmetic. This strategy helped the schools to get good SFNA good performance in 2020 (an interview with Standard Four teachers in school E, which was held on 15<sup>th</sup> March 2021).

In addition, the Academic Teacher in school J had a similar opinion on combining all Standard Four pupils in one class. Specifically, the Academic Teacher had this to say,

Teaching pupils by combining them all in the same class was a good strategy. It helped us to cope with the problem of scarcity of school resources such as classrooms, teachers and desks caused by an increase in the number of pupils' enrolment resulting from FFPEP in 2016 and 2020. The school got good SFNA school performance. Also, this strategy helped slow learners improve their writing, reading and arithmetic because they helped each other (an interview with the Academic Teacher of school J, which was held on 11<sup>th</sup> March 2021).

*Figure 4.4.1: At school G Standard Four Pupils combined in the Class*



**Source:** Field data (2021) on 08<sup>th</sup> March 2021

### **5.8 Forming Studying Groups for Standard Four Pupils**

One of the strategies in teaching is the formation of study groups, irrespective of the availability of resources in schools. Study groups are likely to add value to teaching and learning processes. Reflecting on the use of study groups in Standard Four classes, one of the Standard Four teachers had this to say,

To get good SFNA school performance despite of scarcity of school resources, we agreed to use study for Standard Four pupils. We assigned them exercises and after discussions, every pupil was required to write discussion results in his or her exercise book. Therefore, we used a few available books to share in groups. This strategy helped slow learners to make friends with fast learners who help slow learners in reading, writing and doing arithmetic. I believe it helped to get good SFNA schools' performance in 2020 (an interview with a teacher at school D, which was held on 15th March 2021).

Similar responses were reported using other data collection tools such as interviews. The Academic Teachers, the Head of School and even pupils C, F and I made the same observation with this approach. For example, the Academic Teacher at school F said the following,

In our schools, the strategy we used and which helped this school to get good SFNA school performance in 2020 was forming study groups for Standard Four pupils to cope with the problem of scarcity of school resources such as classrooms, teachers and desks after the implementation of FFPEP in 2016 and 2020. The strategy helped pupils to

improve writing, reading and numeracy because they got enough time to discuss even if there was no teacher, and even where there were not enough books or desks to sit on. Even under the tree, pupils could sit and discuss (an interview with the Academic Teacher of school F, which was held on 16th March 2021).

*Figure 4.5.1: Standard Four Pupils in Groups at School J*



Source: Field data (2021)

### 5.9 A Strategy for Using Part-time and volunteering teachers

In addition to that, another Head Teacher acknowledged that,

Among the strategies that we use to get good SFNA school performance is recruiting part-time teachers. For example, we have a part-time teacher who is a sister from the Catholic Church Mission. She teaches Standard Four pupils because teachers are not enough as there is an increase in pupils' enrolments which does not correspond to the pupils-teacher ratio after FFPEP. This strategy has helped the school to get good SFNA performance (an interview with the Head Teacher of school J, which was held on 11th March 2021).

*Table: 5.9 Strategies for Better SFNA Schools' Performance in the Year 2020*

Items	The frequency of Mentioned (Ranked)				Pupils (N=20)	Total
	DEOs (N=1)	SCCs (N=10)	HTs (N=10)	Teachers (N=10)		
Setting extra-time study for Standard Four classes from morning 7:00 to 8:00 am and 2:30 to 5:00 pm	1 (1.96%)	10 (19.61%)	10 (19.61%)	10 (19.61%)	20 (39.2%)	51 (100%)
Introduction of Saturday class sessions	1 (1.96%)	10 (19.61%)	10 (19.61%)	10(19.61% )	20 (39.2%)	51 (100%)

Provision of Lunch for Standard Four pupils to sustain to remain in school for extra time in the evening	1 (1.96%)	10(19.61%) )	10 (19.61%)	10(19.61%) )	20 (39.2%)	51 (100%)
All Standard Four streams are combined in the same class	1(1.96%)	10(19.61%) )	10 (19.61%)	10(19.61%) )	20 (39.2%)	51 (100%)
Forming groups study in the class	1 (1.96%)	10(19.61%) )	10 (19.61%)	10(19.61%) )	20 (39.2%)	51 (100%)
School desks and classes are repaired	1 (1.96%)	10(19.61%) )	10(19.61%)	10 (19.61%)	20 (39.2%)	51 (100%)
The school use part-time and volunteer teachers	0(00%)	10(20%)	10(20%)	10(20%)	20 (40%)	50 (100%)
One teacher to teach more than two subjects	1 (1.96%)	10 (19.61%)	10 (19.61%)	10(19.61%) )	20(39.2%) )	51 (100%)

**Source:** Field data

## 6. Discussion of the findings

### 6.1 Effects of FFE on SFNA

The research findings have revealed a scarcity of resources in some selected Public Primary Schools in Dodoma City Council (see Table 4.1) due to an increase in the enrolment of pupils against the prescribed Tanzanian Government standards in the Education and Training Policy of 2014 (URT, 2014). Good higher teaching and learning environment assures effective teaching-learning processes (URT,2014; United Nations, 2015; 2022; UNESCO 2022). Predetermined standards such as the required human resources, furniture and rules and regulations create infrastructure and framework for effective learning (URT, 2014; World Bank, 2009). However, FFE led to the enrolment of pupils beyond the optimum available resource (Gakuu, 2012; Macmbinji and Pwani, 2018), resulting in overstretching of the available resources (World Bank, 2009; Mulinya and Odhoro, 2015; Daniel 2020). An increase in the enrolment of pupils in primary schools without a similar increase in the supply of physical facilities and human resources is likely to compromise the quality of education (UN, 2022; URT, 2014). Inadequate desks, chairs, sanitary facilities (i.e., water supply and toilets), textbooks and sporting facilities impair effective teaching and learning (UN, 2015: UNESCO 2022, URT, 2014).

Findings by other studies (i.e., World Bank, 2009; Gakuu, 2012; Mwakalukwa, 2019; Tarimo, 2019) support the findings of the current study. These previous studies concede that FFE resulted

in several negative effects on the quality of education. At all times, they are implementing the FFE policy under pressure to realise the intended goals. Teachers cannot implement the entire curriculum in its broadest sense. They narrow it. In some cases, in Tanzania, teachers have been involved in malpractices such as facilitating examination cheating in public schools because they were under extreme pressure to raise pupils' scores. It is even worse when the morale of teachers becomes low. Accordingly, some previous studies (i.e., Gakuu 2012; World Bank, 2009; Mulinya and Orodho, 2015; Mwakalukwa 2019 and Daniel, 2020) revealed some strategies for coping with or even lessening the negative impact on pupils' academic performance. similar strategies are examined in the current study.

## **6.2 Strategies for Improving SFNA Performance**

The findings show that Dodoma City Public Primary Schools maintained good SFNA performance because teachers used coping strategies (See Table 4.6 and Figures 4.4, 4.5 and 4.6). According to the theoretical framework (i.e., Street Level Bureaucracy), front-line workers include but are not limited to policemen, nurses and teachers who find some ways of providing public service to the citizens amid dilemmas (Lipsky, 1980). In this conception, teachers in schools would not see pupils failing to learn without taking measures to cope with scarce human and physical resources due to the implementation of FFPEP in 2016 (Brodkin, 2012). Therefore, the SFNA in selected schools in Dodoma City Council performed better because teachers had some autonomy, discretion, community participation, sharing experience and context or environment on implementing the policy (Lipsky, 1980; Brodkin, 2012).

The research findings revealed that there were several strategies used by street-level bureaucrats to help improve SFNA performance in Dodoma City Council Public Primary Schools Such strategies include recruiting part-time teachers, engaging volunteering teachers, the use of extra time (early morning, evening and Saturday classes); the provision of lunches, and formation of discussion groups. According to Lipsky (1980), the scoring of more than 90 per cent in Standard Four National Assessment School Performance in Dodoma City Council is explained by the decisive coping strategies. However, critics of street-level bureaucracy do not subscribe to policymakers' belief that bureaucrats/teachers can implement FFE without enough physical,

human and other resources (Brodkin, 2012). This situation justifies varying SFNA in Dodoma City Council

Similar findings are reported in other studies (i.e., Sifuna 2007; Wambui, 2013) revealed that after the launching of FFE Head teachers introduced extra time class sessions due to the scarcity of classrooms. Saturday's classes enabled schools to perform better in Kenya. Similar strategies were used in Tanzania, for example, Mlawa (2017) shows that schools in the Ikungi District of the Singida region in Tanzania used double shifts (dividing pupils into morning and evening sessions). This was envisaged as the best strategy for dealing with the problem of classrooms, desks and teachers. consistent with the findings in previous studies, findings in the current study show that Part-time and volunteering teachers were used in Dodoma City Council. studies (i.e., Mutereko, 2009; Simatwa et al., 2010; Akbour et al., 2015; Mwakalukwa, 2019) show that the strategy helped to bridge the gap of the scarcity of teachers caused by FFPEP. Part-time teachers were paid money contributed by the parents., Teachers could successfully devise coping strategies for better performance of SFNA of schools due to the support of the community. For example, the provision of lunch was possible because of the community. As Akbour et al, (2015) show, due to FFE in Ghana, community participation resulted in the provision of lunch in schools. Sifuna (2007), Wanjiku et al., (2017) and Mlawa (2017) maintain that the community is very important as it supports the implementation of education policy by providing food and money.

Despite those coping strategies maintained and improved scores of SFNA after FFE, it does not mean that the quality of education was improved. High examination scores do not imply effective learning. In a resource-constrained teaching and learning environment, invariably there will be a decline in the quality of education. This is due to inadequate teachers and educational materials in all regions and councils (Broadkin, 2012). In addition, due to the pressure of implementing FFE for good results, there are chances for doing things for the sake of impressing policymakers. The push for performance has a direct impact on test scores, as teaching would focus on tests. Despite the positive effect of coping strategies, teachers would truncate the curriculum against the implementation of effective learning practices. The implementation of policies under extreme pressure, limited resources and low morale may result in unprofessional practices such as cheating in examinations, and cooking data to make reports impressive.

## **7. Conclusions and Recommendations**

The findings revealed that the implementation of FFE in Dodoma City Council public primary schools resulted in an exponential increase in pupils' enrolment in primary schools in Tanzania. The consequences include overcrowded classrooms, a shortage of books, a limited number of teachers and inadequate desks and other facilities. Impliedly, the pupils' performance would be compromised and making it difficult to implement a fee-free education policy. However, the implementation of a fee-free education policy did not affect SFNA performance in Dodoma Municipal Council due to decisive coping strategies employed by the teachers in collaboration with other stakeholders. We recommend teachers in other schools consciously apply coping strategies to improve pupils' performance in Standard Four National Examination

## **8. Policy implications**

The government; through the Ministry of Education Science and Technology and the President's Office, Regional Administration and Local Government Tanzania; has taken important steps to ensure the provision of quality education such as the Education and Training Policy (URT, 2014). Despite the efforts of the government to ensure the availability of school resources, the study has revealed that street-level bureaucrats encountered problems of inadequate teaching and learning materials, shortage of teachers, scarcity of classrooms, insufficient funds, inadequate desks and few books in implementing the policy. The implementation of the Fee free primary education policy was not accompanied by the expansion of financial resources proportionally to the enrolment of students in primary schools. The success of the initiative depended on the street-level bureaucrats. The study proposes that the government should increase resources in the education sector alongside an increase in pupils' enrolment in Tanzania's schools. Coping strategies cannot work better in all local government authorities because of the different contexts and capacities of street-level bureaucrats.

## **9. Limitation of the study and further research**

This study was carried out in only ten (10) public primary schools in Dodoma City Council in Tanzania. It employed a qualitative approach. The findings obtained from this study must be generalized beyond the area of study. Therefore, similar studies can survey other areas to allow generalization of the findings. In addition, other studies can examine the same phenomena in

poor-performing public primary schools. Equally important, a comparative study between well and poor-performing local government authorities' schools in Tanzania can generate insightful findings.

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