# The Governance of Zambian Education system: Challenges and Prospects.

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**Abstract:** *The transformation of Zambia education system since independence has gained attraction from both academia and government experts seeking to investigate factors leading to the change with a view to contribute to academic literature. The focus has been directed to the challenges and prospects of governance of Zambian education system which the study seeks to identify. Moreso, the article adopted Marxist theory by carl max which postulated that the bourgeoisie have monopolized systems of Zambian's government and education sector has not been left either thus jeopardizing the initial role of reforming education sector to benefit the Proletariat. The article used a case study design and qualitative method to collect data from the study. The education institutions for the case study were; Great north road academy, Fairview college of education, Chalimbana University, Macha Secondary School and Mansfield University while the 14 key informants were selected through snowballing. The finding of the study indicated that, the challenges affecting governance of education system in Zambia were; poor and frequent leadership changes, corruption, weak legal-policy frameworks, lack of accountability and transparency in the management and utilization of education resources while prospects were fostering adherence to the education policies, capacity building on the leadership , financing education sector , developing internal control management system and digitizing the education system to enhance efficiencies in services delivery within the education sector.*

**Keyword:** Governance, Challenges, Prospects, Education system

## INTRODUCTION

According to UNESCO, education is a fundamental human right that empowers individuals, promotes social cohesion, and contributes to sustainable development (UNESCO, 2020). It plays a crucial role in enhancing economic growth, reducing poverty, and advancing social justice by equipping individuals with the necessary knowledge and skills to participate actively in the workforce and society. In addition to the acquisition of academic knowledge, education encompasses the development of critical thinking, problem-solving abilities, creativity, and communication skills. UNESCO (2020) further, explained that education also encompasses the transmission of cultural values, ethical principles, and social norms that contribute to the formation of responsible and engaged citizens

According to global studies conducted by UNESCO and UNDP, the world economic crisis caused by lapses in governance, which dominated the eighties, spread in virtue of the constraints imposed by economic globalization. It was also pointed out that the process of restructuring and social adjustment that have taken place in most countries and are still taking place in some, seem to have had a lasting effect on national politics at the expense of education (Cheng, 2000). Argyris (1985) argue that, in order to integrate the education issues into the world economy, citizen or communities must not only acquire the knowledge, skills and tools of traditional knowledge, but above all, they must be capable of acquiring new skills demanded by a knowledge society in order to adapt, adjust and cope with the changing trends cause by globalization. He further stated that, indeed, the resulting rapid change in technological and scientific knowledge make learning a permanent process, a lifelong learning process in the words of the Report of the International Commission on Education for the 21st Century to UNESCO, entitled: Learning, the treasure within. The education sector has not yet acquired the right to benefit from special treatment or to be exonerated from the application of policies limiting public expenditure in general.

Kauffman, Kraay, & Mastruzzi (2007) created a broad corruption index that incorporate data from numerous perception polls. There are certain education sector-specific indicators of corruption and institutional quality that supplement the aggregate measurements. Poor quality prevents parents from enrolling their children in school in the first place for 8% of males and 1% of girls. One mother in the state of Madhya Pradesh, for example, stated why she had never sent her daughter, Rukmini, to school. She added that if her daughter is sent to school, she will have to hire a laborer to replace her, and she thought the kid learned nothing (Schoellman, 2012). Poor governance in education, according to Lewis & Pettersson (2009), lead to inefficiencies in service supply and, in some situations, no services at all. They also claimed that a lack of standards, knowledge, incentives, and responsibility might lead to not only bad performance but also poor educational administration. Zambia's educational system is not an exception, since other African nations are also grappling with issues related to governance. The governance issues facing Zambia's education system are

seriously impairing its efficacy, efficiency, and functionality in addressing the high rates of illiteracy in the nation. In light of this, the study aims to pinpoint obstacles to and opportunities for Zambia's education system governance.


**Literature review**

According to UN (2015), the year 2015 marked a turning point for international education and development. With the experiences of the Education for All (EFA) and Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) ending, and following a long process of consultation and negotiation, the educational community gathered at the World Education Forum in May 2015 and adopted the Incheon Declaration "Education 2030'' Towards inclusive and equitable quality education and lifelong learning for all. In September of the same year, the General Assembly of the United Nations adopted Resolution A/ RES/70 which was transforming our World commonly referred as the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

According to Adams & Kirst (1998), there are multiple levels of education governance, ranging from the central to the local, and a multitude of actors and stakeholders possess varying degrees of authority, power, influence, and responsibility. According to Adams and Krist, governments still hold a major role in structuring education in many nations, but the distribution of responsibilities is shifting in response to calls for greater efficacy, efficiency, accountability, and democracy. According to Augustine et al. (2009), governments must focus more on justice, participation, and transparency because new players—like families, communities, and commercial organizations—are becoming more involved in many elements of education governance. According to Rothstein & Eek (2009), Irina Bokova, the former director general of UNESCO, aptly illustrates the dangers of a lack of accountability by warning that it could impede progress and allow detrimental practices to seep into educational systems. Similar to this, accountability is a pillar and a guiding concept in the Continental Education Strategy for Africa (UNESCO, 2017c) (2016). Numerous academics studying education and high-ranking government officials agree with this. As to Barrera-Osoria et al. (2009), there exist multiple impediments to guaranteeing accountability in South African schools, including... Due to their low financial resources, which are mainly used to pay for running expenses, many SSA countries find it challenging to make any improvements to the educational services they offer to students. Furthermore, the community has high expectations for schools, which are not always met by the institutions.

Without the power to decide what is best for their particular situation, schools in these nations are compelled to carry out the policies and choices of the central government. One of the most challenging problems facing SSA's education systems, according to Ballard & Bates (2008), is finding and keeping qualified teachers who can teach effectively in a classroom setting each day. This has implications for legislation or reform efforts, as low performance on the part of instructors can significantly affect students' outcomes even in the presence of other positive system elements. Ballard & Bates hinted that for students to learn, it is imperative that teachers be held accountable. Teachers' attitudes towards their work improve when appropriate procedures for holding them accountable are put in place, and higher student achievement and quality education are guaranteed.


This has been demonstrated by the high rate of teacher absenteeism, which significantly impedes regional efforts to promote education. According to UNESCO (2017c), there is a significant disparity in teacher absenteeism between rural and remote locations compared to metropolitan areas in several SSA nations. According to Bernbaum & Moses (2011), there was also a problem with capacity support within MOE because the technologies used in EMIS need technical expertise that are not always available from local contractors or the government. In Uganda's case, maintaining response levels and data quality was difficult, necessitating ongoing support from international organisations like USAID. The MOEs in Ghana, Eswatini (formerly known as Swaziland), Liberia, Mali, Namibia, South Sudan, and Zimbabwe, among others in the area, have relied on the technical assistance of consultants to finish some of the most significant EMIS duties. In order to ensure that those involved in education have access to data and statistics, ministries in the SSA region need to put in more effort. Since they may aid in the EMIS process, identifying and involving these stakeholders is crucial. According to Bernbaum and Moses, during the review of the EQUIP2 project in Zambia, it was noted that EMIS figures gained legitimacy and were frequently available for use for specific reasons by organisations other than the Ministry of Education (donors, NGOs, and civil society).

**Empirical review**

Xaba (2011) a study in South Africa highlighted that school governance is the single most critical aspect in education that looks to be facing almost insurmountable obstacles. The paper investigated and studied school governance issues in order to determine their root cause. As members of the school governing board, interviews were held with principals, educators, and parents. The empirical results point to a number of problems with school governance, most of which seem to have to do with the ability or incapacity of school governors to fulfil their duties as required by the South African Schools Act 84 of 1996. Upon closer inspection, the governance issues are most likely the result of the nature of the assigned responsibilities, which call for specialised knowledge and abilities to complete. The investigation turned up a number of excuses from school governors, including dividing the blame among themselves. As a result, it was decided that school governing bodies are failing to meet the difficulties of their tasks and obligations, and that the likely cause for these challenges resides in the specialist nature of most prescribed functions themselves.

Kola, Gana, and Olasumbo in (2017) conducted a study on the impact of bad governance on functional science education in Nigeria. The article discussed the significance of science education in the growth of all nations, including Nigeria. It was contended, however, that scientific education in Nigeria, as studied at universities, polytechnics, and colleges of education, could not be effective since it produced graduates who were not creative. According to the publication, this is due to the country's lack of competent administration. Furthermore, it was stated that corruption in the country constituted the peak of terrible government. Which is similar to the governance challenges facing the education sector in Zambia. The paper further recommended Visionary leaders, total war against corruption, Youth Scientific Collaboration Programme (YSCP) and much more as some of the solutions to these challenges.

Additionally, corruption is widely believed to be detrimental to economic performance. However, little empirical evidence has been presented to assess its consequences on education. Using various education indicators, Dridi in (2014) conducted research which examined the effects of corruption on education both from a quantitative and qualitative point of view. The cross-country regression analysis shows a strong link between corruption and secondary school enrollment rates, but the relationship between corruption and education quality as measured by repeater rates is weaker. The results suggested that high and rising corruption decreases significantly access to schooling. A unit increase in corruption reduces enrollment rates by almost 10 percentage points. These findings are robust to the use of alternative measure of corruption and other sensitivity analysis.

**Theoretical framework**

This study was supported by the Marxian theory on the law (Marxist Legal theory). Since countries' developments in terms of education sector growth are controlled by legal and policy frameworks that tend to favour a clip of powerful people in societies, this has resulted in the implementation of regressive policies that compromise education quality, giving rise to corruption. The Marxist Legal theory by Karl Marx and Fredrick Engel in the 1852 talks about how the concept of law, policies, state and rights such as access to Education in broader perspectives are influenced by the bourgeoisie the few privileged in the society and how it is used against the Proletariat who are communally called the less privilege or disadvantaged. Societies that allow and give freedom to the bourgeoisie to formulate laws and make moral decisions are unjust societies. In the Communist Agenda, Marx explains that the law is simply a reflection of the desires of the Bourgeoisie class.

According to Andrew (1993) the bourgeoisie wield power, and their relationship with the rest of the classes is based on the contract or what they bring with them. Furthermore, the law appears to favour them, as fueled by attorneys, and this has resulted in the restriction of the rights of those with less privilege in society, thereby protecting the essential social right of education and exploitative or retrogressive practices of bourgeois culture. Bourgeois culture rejects the notion of equal access to rights and slavishly sticks to formal legal, moral, or political equality of rights (which benefits the Bourgeoisie). Marx considered the entire thing deeply repulsive). Karl Marx and Fredrick further said that our jurisprudence as proletariat is just the will of the class you subjugate converted into a law for everyone, a will whose basic character and direction are dictated by your class's economic conditions of existence. Some philosophical interpretations of law that have an impact on the social dimension or context of law. These explanations look at law in its working and the myths about functioning of law and truth about its role. The basic tenet of Marxian approach to law is that law, though social system structures it, is an instrument in the hands of the classes in power to use it to protect their own interests.

This theory underpins the study with a view to bringing out the elements of governance affecting the education systems in the contemporary world and poised that they are not naturally caused rather than a clip of the powerful groups in the society are behind the cause and put forward that as time goes by, the emergence of socially constructed society will force it way into the system and eventually the retrogressive laws will wither away.

**Methods**

The study utilized case studies to generate data from target institutions within Lusaka capital city as generalization of the entire groups of institutions in the Zambia. Moreso, the study used secondary data collected from google scholar, Scopus, research gate and ProQuest, through systematic screening of the sources, titles, abstracts, full text screening and removal of duplicates, 12 articles were retained for review. Furthermore, the study utilized qualitative research method in which the data was analyzed through content analysis to generate in-depth information in relation to the topic under investigation.

Sample Breakdown
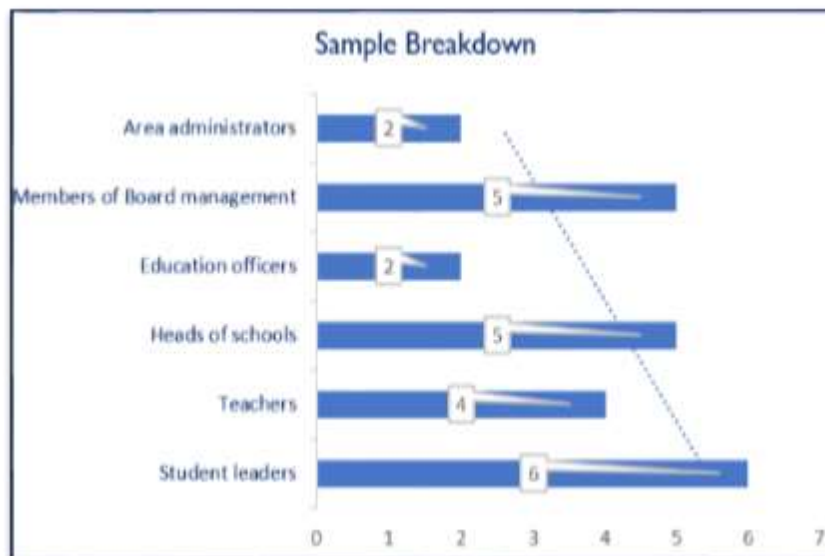
## Results and Discussion

The first variable under investigation sought to establish the challenges facing the governance of education system in Zambia. The respondents had comprehensive understanding of the challenges they face as leaders, stakeholders and education administrators in their guest to create a long-lasting solution for sustainability of education system in Zambia.

**Corruption:** According to the qualitative data the respondents established that, corruption was the main challenge facing education system in Zambia. Corruption has widened inequality gap among Zambian communities as mentioned by most of the respondents interviewed. These assertions resonate with Gupta et al. (2002) state that corruption is likely to produce education inequalities. Moreso, respondents alluded that the Ministry of Education has provided a lot of resources to support infrastructural development, provision of education materials, support to most vulnerable students in schools and improve the management of the school but resources end up in the hands of few individuals within schools and the ministry of education. Inadequacy of the resources marred by corruption has affected provision of quality education to Zambian students. The study finding resonates with Kauffman, Kraay, & Mastruzzi (2007) who argue that unless corruption is stop across government sectors in Zambia, its spillover affects education system and its sustainability will be compromised. Evidence by Mauro (1997) maintain that the GDP of the government spending on education is significantly and negatively linked to the levels of corruption in the county.

> *It is very painful for me to see heads of schools looting funds that are meant to support vulnerable students from poor families or orphan. Some of these students look up to us as their parents but we lack humility to take them as our children and ensure the resources allocated to us are managed and utilize appropriately. It is saddening. (45-year-old HOD, ZA 13)*

**Weak legal & policy framework.** Based on the qualitative data it was evidenced that, the Ministry of higher education instituted legal and policy framework to improve management of education system in Zambia. The ministry formulated education policies with the support of stakeholders drawn from civil society, international organization, think tanks and experts subcontracted by the World bank, UN agencies and Korea government to improve quality of education in Zambia. Some of education policies formulated are Zambia National ICT policy 2006, Ban of Holiday Tuition policy, and Free high school policy. The policies according to qualitative data are paper -based and not workable which points to established weak legal and policy framework. Sifuna (1998) findings demonstrated that universities in Zambia have customized some of the provisions of the education policies but little in terms of its effectiveness has ever been realized. Bamigboye & Adeyemi, (2016) asserted that weak legal and policy framework has crippled the state of education system in Nigeria despite the country's economy projection by 2020 being at twenty across the world. Achievement of the projection by Bamigboye & Adeyemi is a mirage.

> *I have participated in the review of education policies in Zambia.  The framework to me is toothless dog that cannot bit. We have had cases of mismanagement within education sector, employment of untrain teachers and unlawful transfer of teachers and heads of school without clear procedures but the laws are there but no one is implementing sorry to say that. (41-year-old Area Administrator, ZA 16)*

**Inadequate accountability and transparency in the use and management of resources**. According to the respondents, Zambia's education system was severely damaged by a lack of accountability and openness in the administration of resources. Majority have alluded that failure of government to operationalized education legal provisions to tame those making education system to be opaque because of not following laid guideline was what has made it difficult for the ministry address challenge experienced in accounting the resources distributed to all institutions.  According to study finding of Carlo and Daniel (2002) lack of accountability of the public resources has made most of universities and colleges to reconsider restructuring organizational structures social missions, and academic priorities to ensure resources are managed and utilized judiciously.  Furthermore, he alluded that lack of accountability in the management of internal school affairs was the main cause of internal wrangles witnessed between the schools' administrators and board of management. It was also evidenced that majority of the board members appointed by the school and university administrators work hand in hand with them to embezzle funds meant to provide quality education to the students regardless of their social background, race, religion and color in Zambia.

> *I have never witnessed this before my mother gave birth to me. Every time you want to ask for report from the school administrators, they take you in circles until you lose hope for waiting. At time they will ask you to come after sometime to allow them put things in order. You can wait until you end up questioning what is happening (39-year-old, Education officer, ZA 08)*

**Frequent leadership changes:** Based on the qualitative data, the respondents pointed out political interference as the cause of frequent leadership changes in education institutions in Zambia. Too much frustration necessitated by political interference has led to poor management in most of universities, and elementary schools in Zambia. The political elites have made it worse by fueling frequent leadership change in education sector for political gains. Those schools affected by the decision to change management have constantly recorded poor results with most parents opting to change schools for their children. This finding is in line with Sifuna (1998), who contended that academic freedom and university autonomy depend on the state of political system and acknowledged that universities are not totally free from government control. The University of Zambia Strategic Plan for the years 2018–2022 reflects the same difficulty. It is the government's responsibility to keep university running without intervention. A significant amount of government meddling in university governance would impede program implementation by frustrating university systems. Siyum & Gebremedhin (2015) findings backs study finding in the sense that political meddling was primary cause of teachers' professional discontent and schools' inability to meet their primary goals at Nigste-Saba High School in Adwa, Tigray, Ethiopia. Since it tends to restrict their ability to exercise their leadership positions, leadership styles, and decision-making authority within the school, principals are not happy about political involvement in school leadership. It was evidenced that political elites closely monitor every managerial action as well as teaching and learning process, teachers view political interventions in school management as problematic. Qualitative data revealed that political meddling by the ruling party is so pervasive that it has an impact on teachers' academic independence in Zambia because the administrators' preference for party-affiliated instructors is influenced by the political landscape in schools.

> *Our school head teacher was demoted and transferred to provisional school for failing to work with the local politician. Since then, we have been performing badly because of poor leadership. We are calling upon the government to protect the independence of the education sector and ensure those interfere with the affairs of the education in any institutions in Zambia are apprehended regardless of status.*
>
> *(21-year-old Student leader, ZA 21)*

**Prospects of education system in Zambia**

The education system is playing pivotal role of driving the global economy. The growth in global economy is necessitated by robust, exploratory and explorative education system (Udok & Akpan, 2014).

**Financing education system**. Majority of the respondents recommended development of education financing architecture to address financial challenges education system is experiencing. Establishment of financing architecture will improve retention, and transition rate of school going children and student in various education institutions in Zambia. This unique financing support provide opportunity for marginalized and disadvantage students to access higher education and digital services in Zambia education institutions. Rahmadani & Arif (2020), Samson & john (2024) findings resonate with the study findings in the sense that, financing education system supports development of infrastructure and modern facilities which creates convenience environment fostering creativity and innovation culture among learners. According to Johnstone &Tefera (2004) cost shift to the student and parents boost the government financing support towards reduction of the burden imposed by government coupled with rising number of institutions in African countries. Lulat, (2003) added that implementation of the cost augmentation and sharing framework would reduce overdependence on the foreign governments, foreign scholarly societies and multilateral development agencies tagged with conditions. Gallard & Waast, (1993) asserted that 70 % of research grants in Africa are donated to advance western ideologies. Over dependence on the western funding has considerable consequences which directly impact on the institutional norms causing internal tensions (Udok & Akpan,2014, Teferra, 20005, & Enos, 1995)

> *We are requesting the government to increase allocations to institutions either public or privately owned. Majority of families in my location are poor and they cannot afford to pay fees for those students in higher institutions. (39-year-old head teacher, ZA 14)*

**Internal control system in education:** According to the qualitative data, corruption loops in Zambian education system were caused by weak internal control systems such as weak procurement process, poor documentation of cost of operations by heads of departments, unlawful recruitment of teachers and lack of knowledge on the management of resources among teachers and support staff within the institutions. Furthermore, respondents maintain that, stakeholders and donors supporting the education system require transparency in management and utilization of resources allocated to the education systems. Donors' trusts only build up towards education sector when their resources are utilized judiciously. This is because majority of the donors put public finance management measures to address poor management of resources in education sectors. This is because education sector, in light of its diverse stakeholder base, necessitates multifaceted external reporting tools that address different aspects of public resource management and use, including cost and quality of service, financial integrity, and financial control. Moreover, establishment of responsive internal control in Zambian education system will promote accountability hence addressing inefficiencies and effectiveness in utilization of education resources in Zambian institutions. As per the research results of Romzek, (2000), accountability may be defined as an endeavor on the part of an individual or an organization to take responsibility for the performance that is expected by the other party. Relating to the ideas of the study findings, thorough financial accounts which is an appropriate instrument for putting transparency and accountability into practice (Mardiasmo, 2006, Shaoul, Stafford, & Stapleton ,2012). Kartini (2012) findings backs up the study findings by alluding that all public services should be held to a high standard of accountability. Furthermore, three key elements in achieving this goal are bureaucratic intransigence, excessive governance expenses, and inadequate community service.

> *I assessed some of the schools in Lusaka, I realized that majority don't have procurement departments. The external auditor's reports have shown flawed in procurment processes which has led to loss of funds through corruption and mismanagement. The ministry developed internal control systems which have not been implemented to the letter. I am proposing the need to train teachers on how to enforce them to promote accountability in the management and utilization of education resources. (37-year-old teacher, ZA 11)*

**Digitizing education system:** Qualitative data demonstrated the digitization as mechanism to promote efficiencies and effectiveness in Zambian education system. The respondents maintained that adoption of technology in administration of learning to student improves skills, knowledge and attitudes towards education. Majority have attributed new innovations in banking, transport and health sectors to embedment of technology to curriculum of Zambian education system. Furthermore, they praised the Ministry of Education's efforts to support innovation by funding symposiums both locally and nationally. Scientists, educators, and students can work together on scientific projects, conferences, video bridges, and other events through scientific-educational and information-communicational networks, which not only give direct access to a wide range of public databases, educational, artistic, and reference materials, but also serve as an information base of publications. In an era where knowledge is produced at an exponential rate, the challenges of locating credible scientific sources online and developing electronic textbooks for the timely dissemination of updated course materials to all learners have become real. Cloonan & Sanett, (2005) asserted that technological advancement fosters creativity, and innovation in academic space leading to social, economic and political transformational across the world.

> *Digitization of Zambian education system will enhance efficiencies and effectiveness in delivery of education services to learners and stakeholders. It will bridge the technological challenges experienced during adoption of analog model after independence. However, digitization has cost implication thus the government ought to provide enough resources to promote its implementation (19-year-student leader, ZA 34)*

**Capacity building in education reforms.** According to respondents' capacity building is vital in the development of teachers and learners' skills and knowledge. Acquisition of teaching pedagogies among teachers both at lower and higher institutions impact greatly on the academic performance of the students which translate to emergence of skilled, knowledgeable and innovative graduands capable of addressing challenges experienced in the job markets. According to the research findings, lack of teaching skills among trained teachers led to poor management and performance among few education institutions selected for the study. Furthermore, lack of accountability in the education sector in Zambia was attributed to weak and inexperienced leaders managing education sector in various districts in Zambia. Provision of capacity building trainings on child friendly environment, ICT, procurement and education administration would address inefficiencies in administration of education services in Zambia. According to finding of Carpenter et al. (1989), Shulman (1986), Wilson & Wineberg (1988) which resonate with the study findings, teachers must be knowledgeable about the subject matter, the curriculum, students, and subject-specific pedagogy because the new standards for education demand that teachers should develop critical thinking and problem-solving skills. Baes on Ball & McDiarmid, (1990), McDiarmid, Ball & Andeson, (1989) study findings, teachers need to possess a more comprehensive and adaptable knowledge base than what is taught in traditional preservice or in service education programs, or what is required for basic skills approaches, in order to assist students in meeting these new standards.

> *Employment of untrained teachers in education institutions is not a good idea. Most of them lack pedagogies for teaching and resort to teach students the way they want. Parents have always complained to us to have a meeting with administration to resolve this mess before the school performs poorly in national exam. (41-year-Education officer, ZA 24)*

**Conclusion**

The education system plays a pivotal role in transforming economy of most of African countries. Human resource overtime has supported implementation of initiatives geared towards reducing cost of living, job creation, food production and strengthening governance despite experiencing economic, social and political challenges in Zambia. Some of challenges experienced by the workforce in education system are structural in nature and require system transformational change in tackling underlying factors affecting service delivery in the education sector in Zambia. Strengthening governance system promotes transparency and accountability in the management and utilization of resources in the education sector in Zambia. Transparency and Accountability build trust among donors and stakeholders supporting education sector in terms of funding, provision of technical expertise, research collaboration and infrastructural development. This is only necessitated by building thorough financial accountability culture in every education institution in Zambia to ensure resources are utilized judiciously to stimulate continuous support from donors enhancing sustainability of interventions.

**Areas of Further Studies**

There is need for further studies to focus on quantitative data to blend qualitative data utilized by the study with a view to provide concrete evidence to the variables investigated by the authors. Demonstrating quantitatively amount embezzled in education sector through corruption, number of untrained teachers employed overtime, and effectiveness of implementation of legal-policy framework and its effect on sustainability of education in Zambia would invoke formulation of policy interventions geared towards addressing both system and structural challenges affecting education sector in Zambia.

**Disclaimer**

The arguments and views documented in the article are solely for author's and do not represent authors cited in it.

**Conflict of interest**

There was no conflict of interest from the author.

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