



Secondary School Headteachers' Experiences on the Production Unit Projects Option to Supplement Finances in the Free Education Regime in Zambia

By

Ms. Hellen Malaya¹ Professor Nil Ratan Roy²

¹Department of Education Tezpur University (A Central University), Napaam, Tezpur, Assam, India. PIN-784028.

ORCHID: 0009-0007-4334-2018

²Department of Education Tezpur University (A Central University), Napaam, Tezpur, Assam, India. PIN-784028.



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Abstract

The Zambian public school free education policy introduced by the current government has led to increasing financial problems for effective school operations, particularly in secondary education. Educational institutions have chosen to start projects for income generation in order to compensate for budget shortfalls. The practice of school agriculture, or production units as they are called, has expanded throughout the country. This research explored how headteachers handle production unit projects that tackle school financial problems in secondary educational institutions throughout the Kabwe district of Zambia. Eight randomly selected headteachers participated in semi-structured interviews. The results were thematically analysed, highlighting how projects started, the problems they faced, and their achievements and consequences. The situation requires continuous commitment to resilience while promoting collaboration between stakeholders and their active engagement in Kabwe district secondary education.

Keywords: Production unit, Secondary schools, Headteachers' experiences, Kabwe district

Introduction

The educational facilities at secondary schools in Zambia require additional support to obtain sufficient funding for delivering high-quality education. The funds provided by the government to schools do not meet all the various requirements educational institutions must address. The education budget fails to provide enough funding, yet the government prioritizes primary education finance above secondary and tertiary education levels (Educating Our Future, 1996). Within the Education for All policy, the government eliminated every fee, including assessment fees and Parent Teacher Association responsibilities, from public early education institutions and primary and secondary schools. Other essential expenses like textbooks and teacher training with school management improvement receive insufficient funding because teacher salaries take up most public sector expenditures in primary and secondary education. (UNICEF, 2023). The financial shortage in Zambia prompted secondary schools to take initiative through production units, which serve as alternative funding sources for government budget shortfalls.

Background

The Zambian public schools implemented production unit projects as directed by the president throughout 1975 to

prevent persistent funding issues and foster complete learning conditions. (Educational Reforms, 1977). The school's financial sustainability strategy stems from government programs combined with local community involvement in implementing production unit projects. Zambian national development strategies established the foundation for production unit projects, which originated in the country. The Ministry of Education within the government took action by launching pilot projects on school properties that brought income-generating ventures for education funding supplementation purposes (Lutempo, M. G, 2022). The programs offered students hands-on skills education in addition to reducing educational costs.

Literature Review

Research about production unit projects in Zambian secondary schools extends across multiple lines of study involving school financial sustainability analysis and assessments of managerial experiences and performance metrics, as well as resource management approaches (Chasanga, M.A., 2022; Ngoma, M.P., 2022; Chikondano, FM.K., 2023; Kabaso, H, 2023). The literature survey reveals important findings about Zambian secondary school production units, but research is absent in Kabwe District.

Financial Sustainability and Managerial Experiences

*Corresponding Author: Ms. Hellen Malaya



The doctoral dissertation authored by Chikondano FM.K., (2023) and the research conducted by Chisha P., (2022) gave vital knowledge about the achievements and obstacles that Lusaka Province school managers encounter when monitoring production units. Education inequality challenges schools because training levels and resource allocation prove insufficient, according to the research findings. According to Chisanga M.A.'s (2022) situational analysis of Ndola District, it becomes clear that secondary schools must maintain financial stability because their production units frequently miss market targets from operational inefficiencies and weak market connections.

Lutempo M.G., (2022) investigated financial resource mobilization strategies in public secondary schools throughout Lusaka District as part of his research. The analysis contains both new funding methods that involve company collaborations, and it reveals obstacles, including government procedures that slow down financial allocations. Mulolwa K.'s (2022) Mwense District research criticizes how school resource management is conducted, while showing that money mismanagement leads to lower teaching standards, which Mestry R., (2018) found in South African no-fee institutions.

Qualitative Perspectives and Entrepreneurship Education

The authors Simambo et.al (2022) chose a qualitative research method to uncover the real-life experiences of schools operating production units in Kalomo District. Through their qualitative research approach, they bring understanding to the study by showing that project results emerge from both community participation and teacher motivational factors. The doctoral research of Kaala H., (2022) in Nakonde District studied the connection between entrepreneurship education and production units to show their role in developing practical competencies along with student self-dependence.

The study conducted by Nachinguru, G.A., and Mwila, P.M. (2023) in Kinondoni Municipality, Tanzania, displays essential similarities that demonstrate how decentralized financial management methods support school administrative independence. The findings of Ndhlovu et.al (2020) from Chegutu District in Zimbabwe show corruption and inadequate planning to be widespread issues that may also affect production units in Zambia when accountability fails to exist effectively.

Practical Implementation and Unaddressed Gaps

Zangi. J (2019) examined Kafulafuta Boarding School through a case study to show how production units would achieve better food supply to students alongside income development.

Synthesis and Research Imperatives

Various studies, some of which have been cited above, prove that production sites serve economic and educational purposes despite encountering systematic funding shortages, poor management systems, and uneven geographical distribution. Local research about Kabwe district must be done because it would enable policymakers to create specific intervention programs instead of relying on general approaches.

Problem statement

The government of Zambia's decision to opt for free education for primary and secondary schools has created more financial constraints in schools, especially the secondary level (Mwelwa et.al, 2023; Sinkala, G, 2024). To address these shortfalls, the production unit policy in schools has been taken seriously, yet with many obstacles. The primary objective of this article is to delve into the experiences and perspectives of headteachers in Kabwe secondary schools in Zambia regarding the implementation of production unit projects.

Significance of the Study

This study holds significant implications for various stakeholders, including educators, policymakers, and community members. Understanding the headteachers' perspectives on production unit projects can shed light on the effectiveness of such initiatives in mitigating financial constraints. Moreover, the study will encourage researchers to investigate the efficacy of production unit projects across different districts to identify best practices and to examine the long-term impact of these projects on schools' finances and educational outcomes.

Objective

To investigate and comprehend the perspectives of headteachers in Kabwe district secondary schools regarding the initiation, challenges, successes, and impact of production unit projects as supplementary financial resources.

Methodology

Research Design

Through a qualitative research design, researchers investigated the views and experiences of Kabwe district secondary school headteachers regarding production unit initiatives. The phenomenological research approach proved the most suitable because it enables deep examination of numerous aspects related to implementing production unit projects (Bryman, A., 2008).

Participants

The research selected eight headteachers through random sampling among the 30 secondary schools located in Kabwe district (Marshall et al., 2013). The headteacher participants were chosen because they actively participated in decisions related to producing unit projects in their educational facilities. The selected participants meet specific criteria because their knowledge matches the focus of the research investigation.

Data Collection

Interviews with a semi-structured format constituted the main approach for data collection. The interview design includes questions that guide headteachers toward detailed answers about their perspectives on launch processes, successes, failures, and general effects of production unit projects at their institutions (Kumatongo B & Muzata K.K, 2021).

Procedure

The researchers personally met with school headteachers at their selected locations to request their participation, along with a presentation of study goals and ethical procedures.

Each headteacher participated in interviews that took place in separate offices when time allowed them to share their thoughts freely. All interview participants allowed the researcher to record their sessions for accurate phase analysis. Other participants did not approve of recordings. Hence, the study needed to rely on researcher notes instead. The researchers transcribed the recordings in a literal and direct way, so they obtained the complete discourse along with nonverbal expressions.

Data Analysis

Thematic analysis was employed to identify recurring patterns, themes, and insights within the interview data. The data were analysed using the principles of thematic analysis (Braun & Clark, 2006; Fullwood et al., 2017).

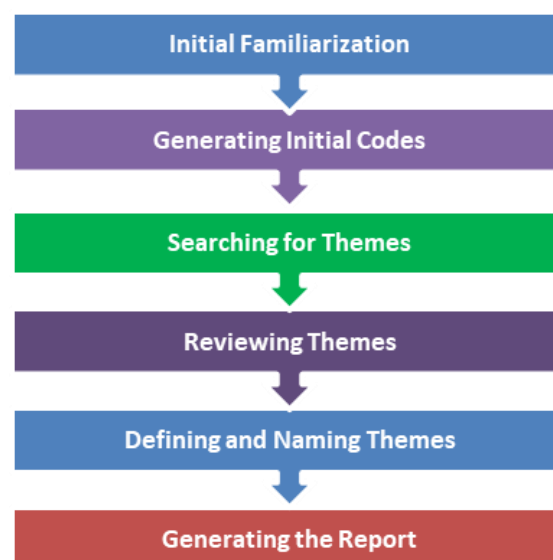


Figure 1: Summary of the analysis phases

Findings

Results from this study utilize shared observations from Kabwe district secondary school headteachers to describe complex aspects regarding how production unit projects begin and the challenges faced, along with their achievements and effects. Every question received detailed responses from the participants in this study. A thematic analysis approach was used to reveal ten identified codes and four different themes. The figure below shows a summary of the themes and codes derived from the study.

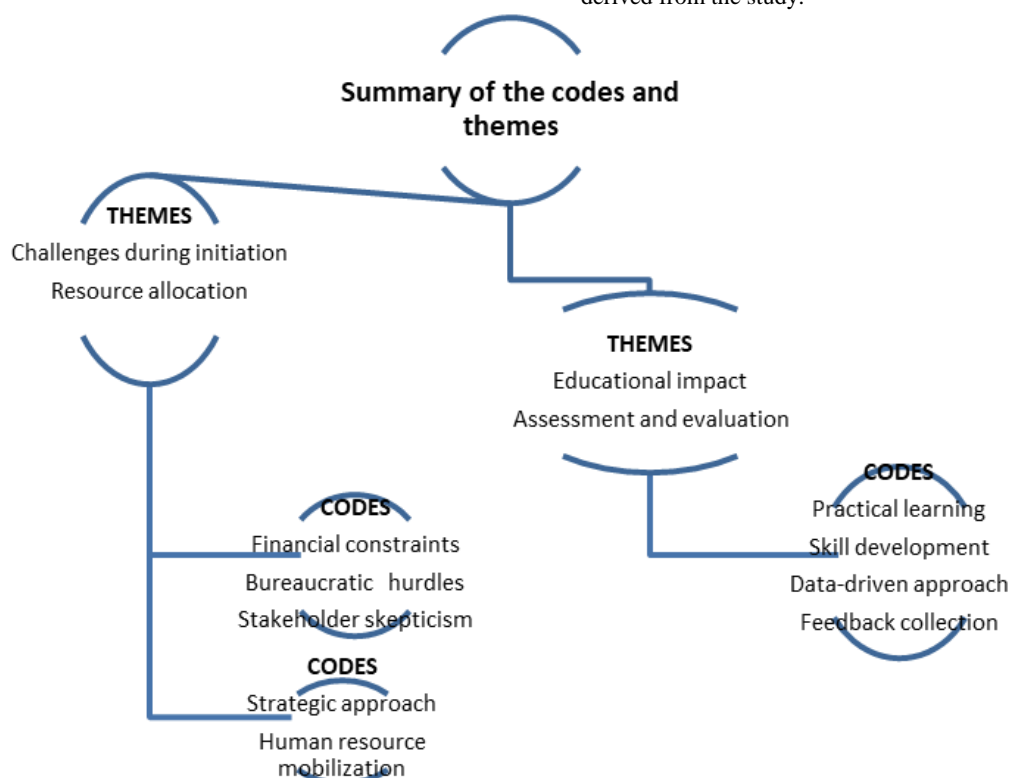


Figure 2: Summary of the codes and themes

Challenges during initiation:**Financial constraints**

Most headteachers from the interviews pointed to capital difficulties when beginning their production unit projects. Startup funding emerged as a key problem for Kabwe district secondary school headteachers when they launched their production unit programs. The existing financial limitations prevented them from getting proper seeds and tools and equipment needed to start their projects.

"One of the most challenging obstacles we faced as a school when starting our production unit initiatives was securing enough initial funds. For example, when we first started our school banana plantation project, we struggled to raise the finances necessary to purchase seedlings, tools, and equipment such as irrigators."

Bureaucratic Hurdles

This discussion revealed that the educational institutions waited longer than expected because of government approval procedures that took too much time. Getting grants for their production unit projects required headteachers to complete extended processing procedures coupled with various documents. Bureaucratic obstacles created obstacles to start-up operations while simultaneously prolonging project execution and multiplying the administrative work required from school administrators.

Research in another conversation revealed that schools needed to wait for extensive government review periods before starting their desired projects. Getting grants for production unit projects required headteachers to deal with extended bureaucratic procedures as well as large amounts of paperwork. Limitations in the bureaucratic procedures created delays in the initial project procedures while simultaneously burdening schools with increased administrative work for their staff.

"Negotiating governmental systems to secure funding was time-consuming and included substantial documentation."

Stakeholder Scepticism

Multiple stakeholders expressed doubt about how the project would deliver advantages to them.

Some stakeholders refused to support the projects because they could not fully understand their meaningful value. Members of the community, together with students and teachers, doubted that the production unit initiatives were worthwhile. The stakeholders opposed some project launch attempts because they needed extra time and effort to understand the practice's benefits and potential effects.

"We experienced resistance from several stakeholders who needed clarification about the project's benefits because, as far as they are concerned, the government gives enough funds to run schools."

Resource allocation:**Strategic Approach**

Resources for the project were obtained through combination of government funding along with community money and fundraising efforts.

"We use government funding, community donations, and fundraising activities to allocate resources."

The research showed that different methods were employed by individual schools to acquire startup funds for their production unit ventures. The headteachers applied strategic resource allocation strategies, which combined government funding with community donations and fundraising activities to procure materials and resources needed for their production unit developments. The strategy enabled maximum resource efficiency for maintaining both project implementation and sustainability.

"When we started our school poultry project, we started by holding morning markets where students were asked to bring some commodities from their homes. After that, we sold them to the community to raise funds to buy chicks, feed, and housing materials. Human resources were allocated by organising teachers and students to offer their time and expertise in caring for the chickens."

Human Resource Mobilisation

Teachers, students, and community members offered their time and knowledge to assist with the execution of production unit projects. This mobilisation of human resources improved project activities while also instilling a sense of ownership and teamwork among project participants.

"We engage with the local community for support, especially our immediate stakeholders such as teachers and students."

Educational impact**Practical Learning**

Production unit projects gave students hands-on learning experiences that improved their knowledge of academic subjects and helped them connect more deeply to their studies. Engaging in practical activities allowed students to apply theoretical information in real-world situations, which improved their learning results.

"I believe that hands-on experiences enhance students' learning and encourage a stronger connection to academic topics. In this school, students learn practical skills related to agriculture and animal husbandry through project participation."

Students learned actual agricultural and animal husbandry skills by participating in production unit projects. These projects acted as skill-development platforms, providing students with significant competencies that may be applied outside of the classroom.

Assessment and evaluation**Data-Driven Approach**

Headteachers established frequent monitoring and evaluation methods to examine the efficacy of production unit projects. This data-driven strategy enabled them to monitor project progress, identify areas for improvement, and make educated decisions that improved project outcomes.

"I do regular monitoring and assessment techniques are used to measure project effectiveness."

Surveys and feedback from students and teachers were used to gather information about the impact of production unit projects and to identify areas for improvement. This feedback-gathering process enabled continuing communication and participation with project stakeholders, contributing to continual improvement initiatives.

Discussion

Initiation and Planning

The initiation of production unit projects within Kabwe district schools begins through community joint efforts that unite teachers with students and residents in boards dedicated to these initiatives. The inclusive methodology creates complete expert and perspective representation, which generates shared proprietorial feelings among all involved. The planning operation requires a dedicated focus on establishing definite project targets, defining task limits, and developing proactive solutions for anticipated difficulties. The research findings of Nachinguru G.A. and Mwila P.M. (2023) correspond to this information. The combined strategic planning effort makes sure the project follows the individual needs and goals of the school community as it develops the basis for successful execution. The involvement of diverse stakeholders during the initial stages helps these initiatives create production activities specifically designed for Kabwe district schools to match local requirements, which will enhance long-term achievement and education, together with community enhancement.

Challenges and Barriers

The implementation of production units at Kabwe district schools requires strategic resilience. Headteachers encounter specific challenges above the standard barriers to acquire startup capital, deal with stakeholder doubt, and decipher bureaucratic obstacles. The scarcity of available land presents an actual challenge that our organization must solve by creating innovative space-maximizing solutions for expansion plans. The implementation timing gets more complex because of seasonal change, so project activities need careful planning for optimal synchronization with positive conditions. The recurring financial shortage of project expansion requires schools to create innovative approaches for managing funds and developing sustainable revenue generation methods, Lutempo M.G. (2022) and Chisanga M.A. (2022). Headteachers address project challenges through resourceful actions that combine efforts to raise outside funding while stimulating community involvement and implementing a demonstration program to prove project value. The comprehensive strategic implementation demonstrates that educational leaders in Kabwe district maintain adaptability and strategic thinking abilities when solving complex problems.

Resource Allocation

The resource distribution process for production unit programs in Kabwe district schools brings headteachers face to face with simultaneous financial and personnel resource

obstacles. Financial resource distribution requires a precise technique that incorporates grants from the government, together with community donations and organized fundraising programs. The primary financial support from government grants enables school leaders to use unpredictable community donations and fundraising initiatives for project sustainability. The funding difficulties demand unique solutions because the situation was described previously by Nachinguru G.A. and Mwila P.M. (2023). The human resources framework stands as the most vital element since teachers, as well as students and community volunteers, share their individual abilities, time commitment, and energetic involvement. Creating a cooperative synergy between the parties requires efficient collaboration combined with effective communication and coordination implementation. The resource allocation process demonstrates how headteachers in Kabwe district utilize their strategic abilities to manage production unit projects in spite of the existing difficulties.

Educational Impact

Production unit projects in Kabwe district schools manifest a profound educational impact, transcending traditional classroom boundaries. The integration of these initiatives into the educational framework not only enhances students' practical skills but also cultivates a profound and tangible connection to the curriculum. By providing a platform for the real-world application of theoretical knowledge, these projects transform learning into a dynamic and experiential journey. Students actively engage with the subject matter, experiencing firsthand the practical implications of concepts learned in the classroom. This hands-on approach not only reinforces theoretical understanding but also fosters critical thinking, problem-solving, and creativity, Shieh R.S. & Chang W (2014). Moreover, the projects serve as living laboratories, bridging the gap between theory and practice. Students involved in agricultural endeavors, for instance, witness the entire lifecycle of crops, from cultivation to harvest, gaining insights into ecological systems, sustainable practices, and agricultural economics. Similarly, production units in other disciplines offer immersive experiences that extend beyond textbooks, creating a holistic learning environment. The educational impact goes beyond skill development; it nurtures a profound appreciation for the interconnectedness of academic knowledge with real-world applications. Students emerge from these experiences not only with enhanced practical skills but also with a deeper understanding of the relevance and impact of their education. As a result, production unit projects stand as transformative pillars, enriching the overall learning experience and preparing students for a more holistic and interconnected understanding of the world around them.

Assessment and Evaluation

Multiple advanced assessment methods determine the evaluation process of production unit projects in Kabwe district schools. The assessment process uses assessment strategies that measure project success through complete methods that analyze numerous aspects of project execution. Project outcomes gain their shape through the feedback that

comes from both internal assessment results and community members. Local community stakeholders contribute important understanding about how projects affect their environment and what significance they hold in the community. Numerous evaluation procedures run in sequence to build a system of ongoing assessment that guides long-term project advancement, as stated by Nachinguru G.A. and Mwila P.M. (2023). Multiple types of data analysis are conducted with precision to uncover important patterns and trends, as well as identify potential improvement regions.

Sustainability and Future Plans

Schools in Kabwe district place the sustainability of their production unit projects at the core while using strategic plans and future-oriented initiatives. A single important financial stability strategy includes creating a rotating fund that originates from project earnings (Carroll D.A. & Stater K.J., 2009). The financial framework establishes a protective system against unsteady finances through a perpetuating economic model that strengthens the enduring success of the projects. The growth of currently operating production units represents the main strategic goal, which seeks to enhance project scale and influence. The planned expansion supports an initiative to investigate new business opportunities that will introduce multiple hands-on learning opportunities for students. Project leaders have strategically set plans to integrate their educational units deeper within academic learning frameworks. Such integration between academic content and production units expands their educational value while making them core elements of the students' learning process.

Lessons Learned and Recommendations

Critical lessons gleaned from the implementation of production unit projects in Kabwe district secondary schools underscore the pivotal role of community engagement and the necessity for adaptability in strategies. The importance of securing community buy-in has emerged as a foundational lesson, emphasizing the need for collaborative efforts with residents to foster a sense of shared ownership and support for these initiatives. Recognizing the dynamic nature of educational landscapes, a key takeaway involves the continuous adaptation of strategies to align with evolving circumstances, ensuring resilience and effectiveness in the face of challenges (Moşteanu, N. R. 2024).

In offering recommendations to headteachers, the insights gained from these lessons guide a set of best practices. Careful planning stands out as a fundamental recommendation, emphasizing the need for meticulous and forward-thinking strategies that account for potential challenges and opportunities. Effective communication emerges as a linchpin, facilitating transparent dialogue with stakeholders, including teachers, students, and the community. The community involvement point reinforces the significance of fostering a collaborative relationship with the local community to garner support and enhance the project's impact.

Moreover, the lessons learned highlight the need for schools to transcend competition and embrace collaboration. Recommendations encourage headteachers to actively seek collaborations with other schools, leveraging shared insights and resources to bolster the success of production unit projects collectively. By fostering a collaborative and communicative environment and incorporating community perspectives into project planning, headteachers can navigate challenges more effectively and optimize the positive impact of production unit initiatives in Kabwe district schools.

Conclusion

Secondary schools in Kabwe district benefit from production unit projects to supplement the insufficient funds to run their institutions. These projects also transform student learning into hands-on experiences alongside community service activities. Headteachers present their experiences, ranging from the initial stages of planning and sourcing human and financial resources to the results. Initiatives that involve co-operation establish these projects to resolve problems related to initial capital access, in addition to confronting doubts and administrative delays. The secondary educational sector within Kabwe district continues its innovative development toward diversified measures to curb financial constraints.

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