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Perceptions of Teachers on the Role of Institutional Support in Professional Career Development at Undergraduate and Postgraduate Education Programmes in Zambia

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ABSTRACT:- This study investigated the perceptions of Teachers on the role of institutional support in their enrollment for undergraduate and postgraduate education programmes in Zambia, with primary research. The study aims to provide insights into how institutional policies, resources, and support mechanisms impact professional development and the pursuit of higher education among teachers. Findings from the primary research reveal that 55% of teachers perceive institutional support as inadequate, while 23.3% view it as moderate, and a minority (10.8%) consider it supportive. An independent samples t-test showed no significant difference between primary and secondary teachers' views on institutional support ($p > .05$, $t = 2.67$, $df = 227$). However, there was a significant difference in perceptions of policy frameworks encouraging enrollment ($p < .05$, $t = -2.19$, $df = 227$), with both groups agreeing on the positive role of policy frameworks. Qualitative insights further illuminate the challenges and gaps in institutional support, highlighting the need for enhanced mechanisms to facilitate teacher participation in higher education programmes.

Keywords: Teacher Perceptions, Institutional Support, Policy Analysis, Enrollment

I.   INTRODUCTION

Globally, there has been a significant expansion of teacher education programmes, particularly in response to the growing demand for qualified teachers (UNESCO, 2020). This expansion includes both undergraduate and postgraduate programmes, aiming to enhance the quality of education and address teacher shortages.

Many countries emphasize continuous professional development (CPD) as a key component of teacher education. This trend is driven by the recognition that ongoing education is crucial for teachers to stay updated with new pedagogical approaches, technology integration, and subject matter expertise (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017).

Institutional support, including financial aid, academic resources, and policies that encourage career development, has been identified as a critical factor in determining the success of teachers' enrollment in higher education programs (Schleicher, 2018). In many cases, institutional support can either encourage or hinder teachers' pursuit of further education. While some institutions provide robust support structures, others may fall short, leaving teachers without the necessary resources to succeed. These disparities in institutional support can lead to inequalities in professional development opportunities, with many teachers in Zambia facing significant barriers, such as limited access to funding, inadequate training resources, and a lack of institutional guidance.

One of the key global trends in teacher education has been the emphasis on continuous professional development (CPD), driven by the need to ensure that educators are equipped with the latest pedagogical techniques and knowledge to effectively teach in rapidly changing educational environments (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017). CPD is recognized as crucial for ensuring that teachers stay up-to-date with evolving curriculum standards, the integration of technology in classrooms, and new methodologies in student assessment and engagement. In Zambia, while the Ministry of Education acknowledges the importance of CPD, many teachers still struggle to access opportunities for further education due to inadequate institutional support (Ministry of Education Zambia, 2019). The lack of sufficient support mechanisms has been a significant barrier, limiting teachers' ability to enhance their qualifications and improve their classroom practices.

In addition to policy and financial constraints, teachers in Zambia also face significant challenges related to socio-economic factors. Many teachers work in under-resourced schools, where they are expected to manage large class sizes and deliver quality education with limited materials and support (MOE, 2019). These conditions not only affect the quality of education but also limit teachers' capacity to pursue further studies, as they are often overburdened by their day-to-day responsibilities. Furthermore, socio-economic challenges such as low salaries and the high cost of education make it difficult for teachers to invest in their professional development without adequate institutional support (UNESCO, 2020). Thus, improving institutional support for teachers is crucial to overcoming these challenges and promoting equitable access to higher education.

In Zambia, as in many developing nations, the presence of well-qualified teachers and the quality of education are pivotal in driving the country's socioeconomic progress. According to the Ministry of Education (1996), teacher education is essential for ensuring both the global and national effectiveness of the educational system. UNESCO underscores this, noting that well-trained educators are crucial for achieving Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG 4), which focuses on quality education and lifelong learning opportunities for everyone (UNESCO, 2019). This highlights the need for investment in professional development programs to equip teachers with the requisite knowledge and skills. Additionally, the United Nations emphasizes the significance of quality teacher training in fostering sustainable development, global citizenship, and cultural diversity as outlined in its 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (United Nations General Assembly, 2015).

On a national level, the Zambian Ministry of Education acknowledges the importance of teacher training in enhancing educational quality. The National Teacher Policy in Zambia prioritizes continuous training and support for educators to boost their skills and meet diverse learning needs (Ministry of Education Zambia, 2019). The 1996 Educating our Future policy reinforced this focus on ongoing teacher development to improve their competencies and address varied educational requirements (Ministry of Education, 1996). Nevertheless, Zambia confronts substantial challenges in recruiting and retaining skilled teachers due to various socioeconomic factors, as noted in the MOE (2019) report, which raises concerns about the quality and sustainability of the education sector. Against this backdrop, this study aims to explore the Perceptions of Teachers on the Role of Institutional Support in Professional Career Development at Undergraduate and Postgraduate Education Programmes in Zambia and and Challenges in Access to Higher Education.

1.1 Research Problem

Despite global and national efforts to enhance teacher professional development through continuous education, there remain significant challenges in Zambia concerning the role of institutional support in promoting teacher enrollment in undergraduate and postgraduate education programs. According to UNESCO (2019), well-trained teachers are essential for achieving educational quality, particularly within the framework of Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG 4), which emphasizes inclusive and equitable education. However, in Zambia, teachers often face institutional barriers that hinder their participation in these programs. The Zambian Ministry of Education's National Teacher Policy (2019) advocates for continuous training and support, yet a notable proportion of teachers perceive institutional support as inadequate (MOE, 1996; MOE, 2019).

This raises concerns about the extent to which institutional policies, resources, and support mechanisms effectively meet the needs of educators. Prior research highlights that ongoing professional development is vital for teachers to keep up with evolving pedagogical methods and integrate technology into the classroom (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017). Yet, many teachers in Zambia still encounter challenges related to insufficient support, which can deter them from pursuing further education.

Thus, this study seeks to explore the perceptions of teachers regarding institutional support for higher education and to identify the barriers that impede their access to these programs. Addressing these issues is critical, as inadequate institutional support may not only limit teachers' career development but also undermine the overall quality of education in Zambia.

1.2 Research Objectives

1. To investigate how teachers perceive institutional support in facilitating their enrollment in higher education programmes.
2. To explore the challenges teachers face in enrolling in undergraduate and postgraduate programmes, despite the availability of institutional support.

1.3 Significance of the study

Addressing Educational Gaps and Socioeconomic Progress: Zambia, like many developing countries, faces challenges in maintaining a highly qualified teaching workforce, which directly affects the quality of education and, consequently, the country's socioeconomic development (UNESCO, 2019). This study is significant as it investigates the barriers teachers face in enrolling in further education, contributing to the

broader goal of achieving Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG 4) on quality education. Enhanced institutional support for teacher education can lead to better educational outcomes and drive national development.

Enhancing Teacher Professional Development: This study is significant as it addresses the role of institutional support in teacher enrollment in higher education, which is crucial for improving teacher competencies. Continuous professional development is vital for educators to stay updated with modern pedagogical techniques and integrate new technologies (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017). By identifying gaps in institutional support, the study can help improve mechanisms that encourage teachers' participation in professional growth programs, ultimately raising the quality of education.

Influencing Educational Policy: The findings of this study can provide valuable insights for policymakers in Zambia. It examines how current institutional policies impact teachers' access to higher education and highlights areas where these policies may fall short. By uncovering the perceptions of teachers, the study can guide reforms in the National Teacher Policy and other educational frameworks to better align institutional support with teachers' needs, promoting equity in access to education (Ministry of Education Zambia, 2019).

II.   METHODS

The study adopted a mixed-method approach, combining quantitative and qualitative methodologies to provide a comprehensive view of the research problem. Quantitative methods focused on measuring challenges in teacher education program enrollment, while qualitative methods explored participants' perspectives. A Sequential Explanatory Design was used, starting with quantitative data collection from a sample of 240 respondents, followed by qualitative analysis through structured telephone interviews with 10 participants. The study covered six provinces namely Lusaka, Luapula, Copperbelt, North Western, Southern, and Eastern. The study employed probability sampling to ensure a representative sample. Data was collected via questionnaires and structured interviews. The analysis included statistical methods and triangulation to ensure validity, reliability, and trustworthiness. Ethical considerations were addressed, including obtaining permissions and ensuring participant confidentiality.

III.   FINDINGS

The findings of this study reveal significant insights into teachers' perceptions of institutional support, highlighting critical areas of inadequacy and opportunities for enhancement in facilitating enrollment in undergraduate and postgraduate education programs in Zambia.

Demographic data on the teachers academic qualifications, gender and teaching experience was gathered and the results are presented below:
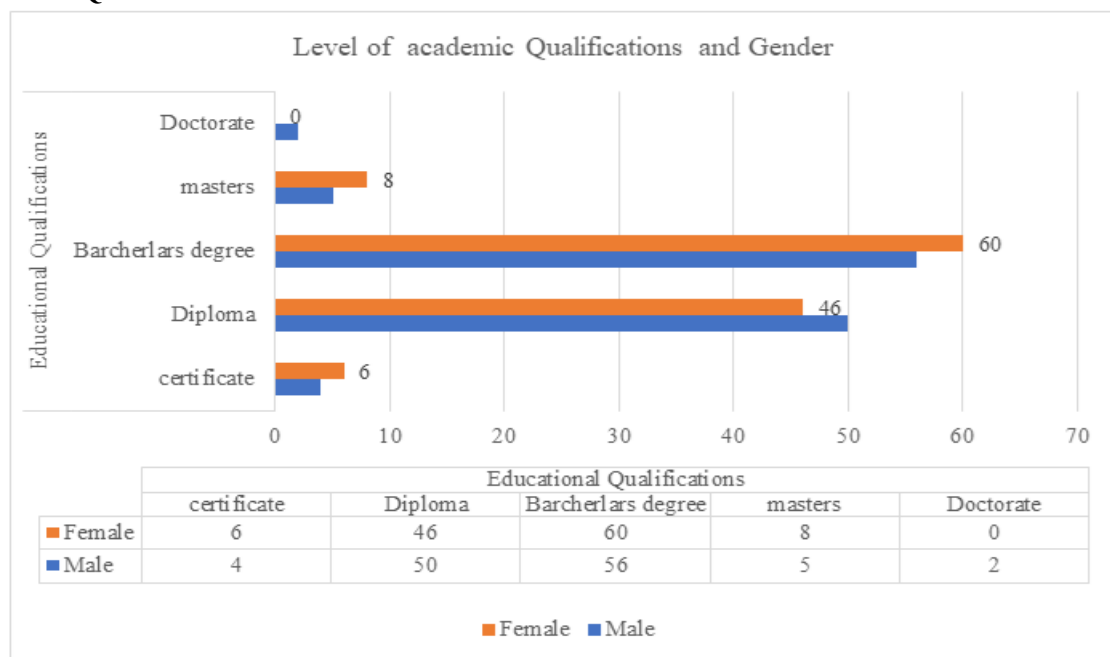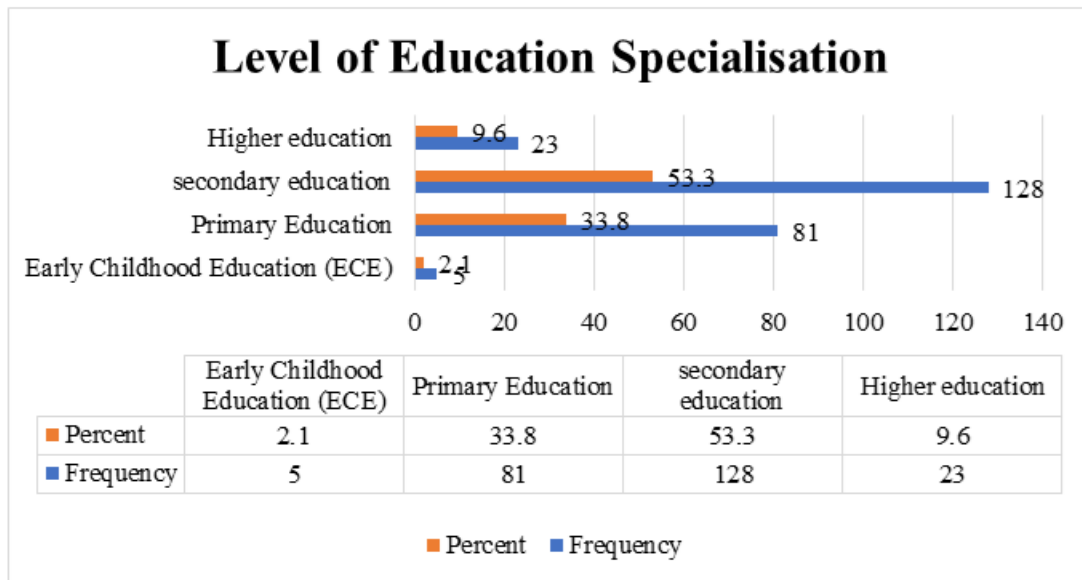
Academic Qualifications

Educational Qualifications				
	certificate	Diploma	Barcherlars degree	masters	Doctorate
Female	6	46	60	8	0
Male	4	50	56	5	2

■ Female ■ Male

Figure1: Level of Educational Qualifications By Gender

Level of Education Specialisation

	Early Childhood Education (ECE)	Primary Education	secondary education	Higher education
■ Percent	2.1	33.8	53.3	9.6
■ Frequency	5	81	128	23

■ Percent ■ Frequency

The level of teaching specialization among the participating teachers indicates a diverse distribution across different educational tiers. A significant portion, 53.3% (128 out of 237), specialized in secondary education, showcasing a substantial emphasis on teaching at the high school level. Additionally, 33.8% (81 out of 237) of the teachers specialized in primary education, indicating a considerable focus on teaching at the elementary level. Furthermore, 9.6% (23 out of 237) specialized in higher education, demonstrating a smaller but notable representation of teachers involved in tertiary education. Moreover, 2.1% (5 out of 237) specialized in Early Childhood Education (ECE), highlighting a smaller portion of teachers dedicated to early childhood development.

Teaching Experience

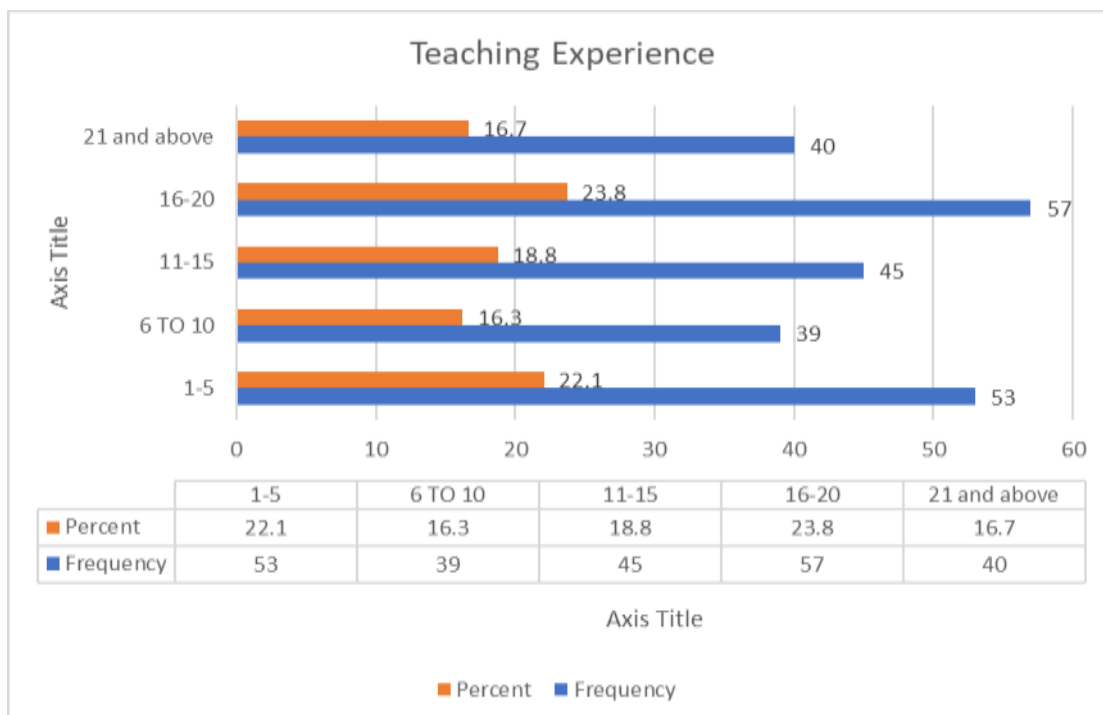|	1-5	6 TO 10	11-15	16-20	21 and above
■ Percent	22.1	16.3	18.8	23.8	16.7
■ Frequency	53	39	45	57	40

Axis Title

■ Percent ■ Frequency

Figure 2: Teaching Experience

The level of teaching experience among the participating teachers showcases a diverse range of tenure within the profession. A notable proportion, 23.8% (57 out of 239), of teachers reported having 16 to 20 years of experience, indicating a substantial number of educators with a significant tenure in teaching. Additionally,

22.1% (53 out of 239) of the teachers reported having 1 to 5 years of experience, showcasing a considerable portion of relatively new entrants into the profession. Moreover, 18.8% (45 out of 239) reported having 11 to 15 years of experience, demonstrating a significant number of teachers with moderate tenure. Furthermore, 16.7% (40 out of 239) reported having 21 years or more of experience, indicating a substantial representation of experienced educators. Finally, 16.3% (39 out of 239) reported having 6 to 10 years of experience, highlighting a moderate proportion of teachers with a mid-range tenure.

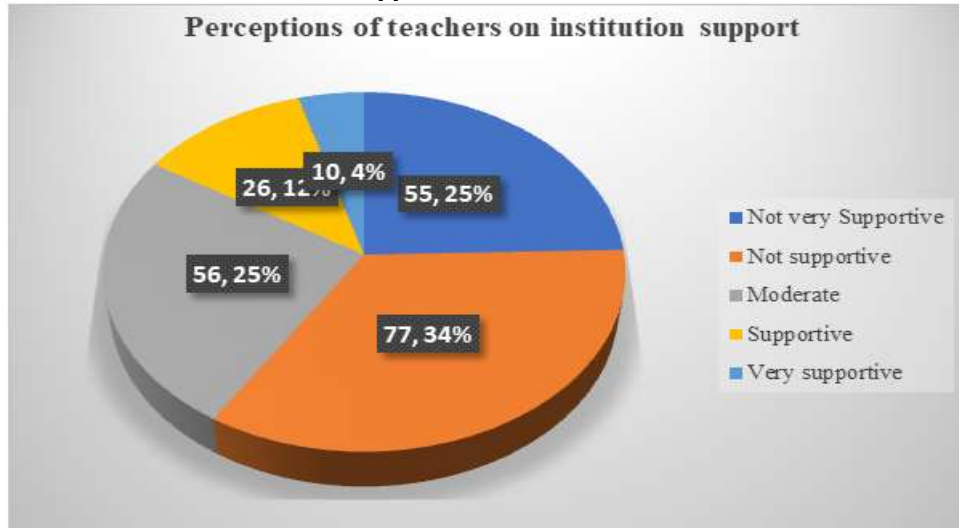**Perceptions of Teachers on Institutional Support**

Figure 3: Perceptions of teachers on institutional support

The study sought to establish the perceptions of the teachers on the institutional support they received. Findings on teachers' perceptions of institutional support that facilitates teacher participation in undergraduate and postgraduate programs in Zambia illustrate a range of views. A significant proportion of respondents, 55 percent, perceive institutional support as either not very supportive or not supportive, indicating a general feeling of inadequacy or inadequacy. This indicates potential challenges or barriers that teachers face in entering and transitioning into training programs due to gaps in institutional support mechanisms. However, a significant part, 23.3 percent, considers institutional support to be moderate, indicating a neutral attitude or uncertainty about its effectiveness. On the positive side, a minority of teachers, 10.8 percent, consider the institution's support supportive, and an even smaller portion, 4.2 percent, consider it extremely helpful. These results highlight the importance of addressing gaps in institutional support to increase teacher numbers and participation in training programs, ultimately contributing to improving the quality and accessibility of education in Zambia.

To Further investigate the perceptions of teachers on the role of institutional support in teacher enrollment in undergraduate and postgraduate education programmmes in Zambia, we performed an independent samples t-test to assess if there is a significant difference between the mean scores of two independent groups namely primary teachers (Category 1) and secondary teachers (Category 2). This helped the researchers to establish if Category 1 and Category 2 have significant differences on the views regarding the perceptions of teachers on the role of institutional support and policy frameworks in encouraging teacher enrollment in undergraduate and postgraduate education programmmes in Zambia. Table 9 illustrates the results of the independent t-test performed.

Table 1: Independent samples t-test between Category 1 and Category 2

		Group	N	Mean	Mean Diff	SD	t	Df	Sig
Institutional support in encouraging teacher support	Equal Variance Assumed	Category 1	117	4.29	-.02	.765	2.67	227	.148
		Category 2	112	4.31		.021			
Policy frameworks in encouraging teacher support	Equal Variance Assumed	Category 1	117	4.65	.01	1.294	-2.19	227	.003
		Category 2	112	4.64		.045			

Significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed)
Source: Fieldwork, 2024

Results in Table 1 indicates that there is no institutional support from the government in encouraging teacher enrolment in undergraduate and postgraduate education programmmes in Zambia ($p > .05, t = 2.67, df = 227$). Also, results in Table 9 indicates that the mean for Category 1 is 4.29 and for Category 2 is 4.31 which are similar. Indicating that both Category 1 and 2 hold similar views that there is no institutional support from the government in encouraging teacher enrolment in undergraduate and postgraduate education programmmes in Zambia.

Additionally, Results in Table 1 indicates that the policy frameworks which encourage teacher enrolment in undergraduate and postgraduate education programmmes in Zambia ($p < .05, t = -2.19, df = 227$). Also, results in Table 5 indicates that the mean for Category 1 is 4.65 and for Category 2 is 4.64 which are similar. Indicating that both Category 1 and 2 hold similar views that policy frameworks encourage teacher enrolment in undergraduate and postgraduate education programmmes in Zambia.
Qualitative findings, the following themes emerged:

Theme 1: Lack of Government Bursaries for In-Service Teachers
Teachers identify the absence of government bursaries or student loans as a major barrier to enrolling in undergraduate and postgraduate education programs. Without financial support, many find it difficult to cover the high costs associated with further education.

Theme 2: Limited Study Leave Opportunities for Career Advancement
Teachers are dissatisfied with the insufficient study leave opportunities provided by the government for career advancement. They express frustration with the bureaucratic nature of the application process and the lack of adequate time off to balance teaching responsibilities with their studies.

Theme 3: Insufficient Support Services and Guidance from Schools and District Offices
Teachers perceive a lack of support services and guidance from schools and district offices as a significant obstacle in their pursuit of higher education. They feel that the enrollment process is complex and that there is inadequate assistance available to help them navigate admissions, financial aid, and other critical aspects of further education.

Theme 4: Lack of Professional Development Opportunities
Teachers perceive a lack of professional development opportunities as a hindrance to their educational advancement. They feel that there are insufficient programs available to help them stay current with educational trends and methodologies, which affects their motivation to pursue further studies. The absence of structured professional development programs leads to feelings of stagnation and lack of progression in their careers.

Theme 5: Inadequate Communication and Awareness
Teachers express concerns about inadequate communication and awareness regarding available educational programs and support. They feel that information about funding, study leave, and professional development opportunities is not effectively disseminated. This lack of awareness prevents many from taking advantage of potential opportunities for further education and career growth.

Theme 6: Perceived Inequities in Access to Education Programs
Teachers report experiencing inequities in access to education programs, with some feeling that opportunities are not equally distributed among different regions and institutions. They believe that teachers in less accessible areas face greater challenges in enrolling in and completing higher education programs due to logistical and financial constraints.

Theme 7: Need for Tailored Support Services
Teachers advocate for tailored support services that address the specific needs of in-service teachers. They suggest that personalised assistance, such as mentorship programs and targeted financial advice, would help them better navigate the enrollment process and make informed decisions about their educational paths. This personalised approach is seen as essential for overcoming barriers and achieving their academic goals.

IV.   DISCUSSION

The findings on the perceptions of institutional support among Zambian teachers regarding institutional was generally perceived as inadequate, reflecting significant barriers hindering the contagious career development of teachers. The finding highlights staggering 55% of respondents perceived institutional support a crucial need for systemic reforms to address gaps in support mechanisms and enhance accessibility to education

programs. Furthermore, the study identified that 23.3% of teachers held a neutral attitude towards institutional support, indicating a pervasive uncertainty about its effectiveness. Only a minority of teachers, comprising 10.8%, considered institutional support as supportive, while a mere 4.2% deemed it very helpful. The qualitative analysis further elucidates these challenges, with teachers expressing frustrations over the lack of government bursaries, limited study leaves opportunities, and insufficient support services from schools and district offices. Government support for teacher education yields numerous benefits that positively impact both educators and students. Firstly, adequate funding allocated by the government enables the development and implementation of robust teacher training programs, leading to the enhancement of teaching quality (Darling-Hammond & Rothman, 2011). Additionally, government-backed initiatives can facilitate the provision of scholarships, grants, and financial assistance to aspiring teachers, thereby increasing accessibility to higher education and attracting talented individuals to the profession (UNESCO, 2015). Furthermore, investment in teacher education contributes to the continuous professional development of educators, equipping them with updated pedagogical knowledge and skills to adapt to evolving educational trends and challenges (Darling-Hammond & Rothman, 2011). Improved teacher quality, in turn, has been linked to enhanced student academic achievement and overall educational outcomes (Hanushek, 2011). Thus, government support for teacher education plays a pivotal role in fostering a skilled and motivated teaching workforce, ultimately benefiting the educational landscape and societal development as a whole.

V.   CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Conclusion

This chapter examined teachers' perceptions of institutional support for undergraduate and postgraduate education programs in Zambia. Findings reveal a widespread view that institutional support is inadequate, with the majority of teachers expressing dissatisfaction. Key issues include the lack of government bursaries, limited study leave, and insufficient support services. Both quantitative and qualitative data highlight the need for systemic reforms to improve access and support for teacher education. Enhanced government investment and targeted support mechanisms are crucial for advancing teachers' professional development and improving educational outcomes.

5.2 Recommendations

General Recommendations:
  i.   Increase Funding: Enhance financial support mechanisms for teachers pursuing further education, including scholarships and grants.
  ii. Expand Study Leave Opportunities: Improve policies to provide more flexible and accessible study leave options for career advancement.
  iii. Improve Communication: Strengthen efforts to disseminate information about educational opportunities and support services effectively.

Institutional Recommendations:
  i.   Develop Support Services: Establish comprehensive support services within schools and district offices to assist teachers with enrollment processes and financial aid.
  ii. Strengthen Professional Development Programmes: Introduce structured professional development programs tailored to the needs of in-service teachers.
  iii. Address Regional Inequities: Ensure equitable access to education programs across different regions, particularly for teachers in less accessible areas.

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