

## **Fee-free Education Policy and Students Performance in Public Secondary Schools in Tanzania; The Role of Parental Involvement**

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**Abstract:** *In 2014, the government of the United Republic of Tanzania issued 'Education and Training Policy' directing authorities to ensure education provided in public secondary schools is free of charge in a move to lessen burden shouldered by parents. Nevertheless, the 'fee-free education policy' is possibly misunderstood by parents as they no longer show interest in participating in school matters. How this affects students' academic performance has remained unknown. This study investigated students' academic performance and role of parents in building effective school climate in public secondary schools after implementation of the fee-free education policy. A sample of 83 participants including 40 students, 29 teachers, 10 parents and four heads of schools were involved. Data were collected using structured questionnaires and interview guides. Archived data were extracted from Ilala Municipality's database in the city of Dar es Salaam. We used SPSS version 20.0 to code and analyze quantitative data using descriptive statistics and reported the results in frequencies, tables, pie charts, bar graphs and histograms. Content analysis was employed to analyze qualitative data. The results showed a slight increase in students' enrolment in Form I. Notwithstanding, no significant change observed in students' academic performance during the four years, 2014-2018 and, the number of students who complete Form IV secondary education is declining. Moreover, among the respondents, 82% agreed that, interpersonal relationship among teachers, parents and students is necessary to promote students' academic performance and 66% indicated that parental involvement is imperative to foster students' learning. Lack of dormitories/ hostels for students and inadequate libraries were noted as main factors affecting students' performance. Taken together, the findings of the current study suggest that providing free education alone does not improve students' academic performance in public secondary schools in Tanzania, therefore, government and educational stakeholders, including parents should take immediate action to ensure conducive learning environment and availability of resource centers in public secondary schools.*

**Keywords:** *Fee-free education, Parental involvement, School climate, Academic performance*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Schools, like most community institutions, cannot work independently; community participation in strengthening interaction and creating a warm environment for teachers, students and parents is vital (Best Practice, 2002). As suggested in the theory of overlapping spheres of influence (Epstein and colleagues 2002), views and opinions reciprocity among teachers, students and family is a driving factor for effective organization which focuses on students' learning and success, hence, improved school climate.

Scholars are yet to come in consensus on what should be the correct definition for 'school climate'. School climate may refer to the schools' physical and social environment which is typically independent on students' and teachers' perception (Voight & Nation, 2016). Nonetheless, school climate can be created merely by the relationships and interactions among students, teachers, parents and guidance officers. As well, school climate may refer to the spheres of life including safety, relationships, teaching and learning, the environment and organizational patterns (Jonathan et al, 2009). Parents' income also needs to be considered in school climate as economically disadvantaged students fail to make the same rate of progress throughout their years of schooling (Morgan, 2012). 'Fee-free education policy' is a measure which has been adopted by many governments as they try to ease the burden shouldered by parents. However, as pointed out by Scallion (2010), this only may not suffice without internal characteristics that distinguish one school from another. Schools differ in many ways; some have quality and adequate staff buildings and classrooms to accommodate the given number of students, while others are faced with severe students overcrowding. Students overcrowding significantly reduces student's ability to concentrate on studies and increases violence.

Thapa, Cohen, Guffey, & D' Alessandro (2013) contended that, school climate includes the norms, values and expectations that support people's feelings socially, emotionally and physically. Despite the differences in their views, most researchers agree that, school climate is multidimensional construct which includes *physical*; (appearance of the school building and its classrooms, school size and ratio of students to teachers in the classroom, order and organization of classrooms in the school, availability of resources, and safety and comfort), *social*; (includes quality of interpersonal relationships between and among students, teachers, and staff, equitable and fair treatment of students by teachers and staff, degree of competition and social comparison between students and degree to which students, teachers, and staff contribute to decision-making at the school), and *academic*; (quality of instruction, teacher expectations for students' achievement, and monitoring students' progress and promptly reporting results to students and parents) dimensions.

Parental involvement refers to the participation of parents in a range of school-based and home-based activities in order to improve their children's education (Maluleke, 2014). It is an essential component of every teacher-student-school academic endeavor. Parents are among the stakeholders of the school community who play a tremendous role in children's educational and environmental transformation, thus, the intensity or extent of their participation in school climate must be realized (Sapangun & Sapangun, 2014). Low parental involvement in monitoring activities of their children toward academic work has been reported in other places (Gyamfi and Pobbi, 2016). Nyembeke (2016) performed a study in Kilosa, Tanzania and found that, 67% of parents of registered students in community schools do not participate in their children's academic activities.

## STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

In 2014, the government of the United Republic of Tanzania issued a fee-free education policy for all public primary and secondary schools. Whether this has improved students' academic performance or affected parental involvement in school activities to create effective school climate has remained unknown. There is also no account on the standardized guide or strategy in which school administration involves parents in building school climate in public secondary schools.

## PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of the study was to assess students' academic performance and determine the role of parental involvement in building effective school climate in public secondary schools after implementation of the fee-free education policy in Tanzania.

## OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY

To evaluate students' academic performance and the role, strategies and challenges of parental involvement in building effective school climate in public secondary schools in Ilala Municipality, Dar es Salaam, Tanzania.

## RESEARCH QUESTION

How is the students' performance, strategies and challenges faced by school leaders to improve parental involvement in school matters after introduction of fee-free education policy?

## SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

The findings of this study will be useful to school administrators in devising effective means for involving parents to create effective school climate. They will also help parents to discover their potential and have feeling of ownership of the school despite implementation of the fee-free education policy, hence, improved students' academic performance.

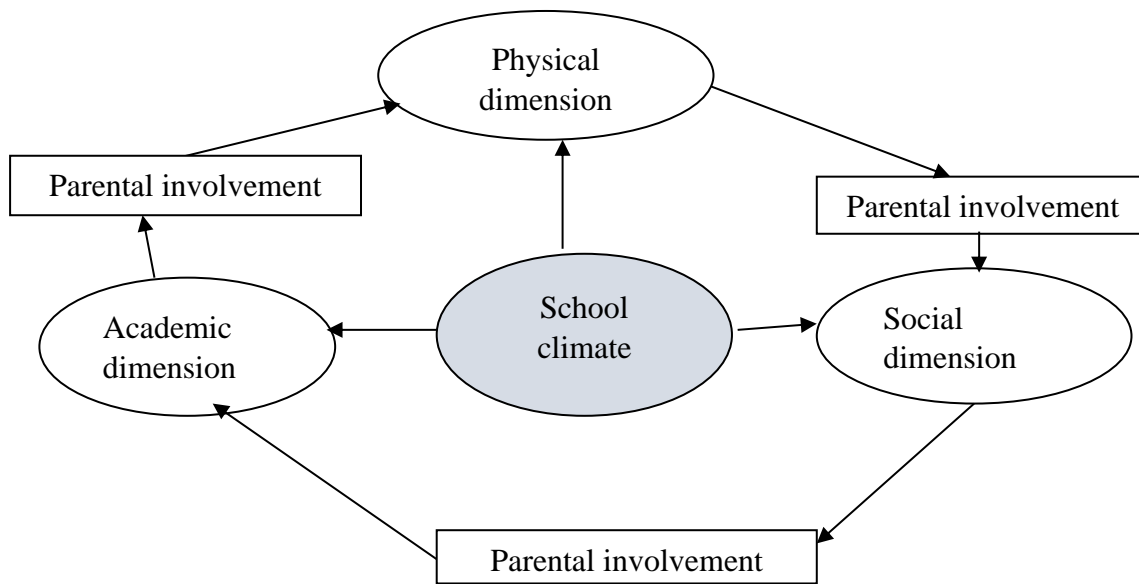
## THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study was guided by the theory of overlapping spheres of influence developed by Joyce Epstein and colleagues (2002). It was developed as a need to alter the sociological theory of effective organization to focus on students' learning and success. The framework is based on findings from many studies of the factors that are most effective in children's education. According to the theory, six principles which are parenting, communicating, volunteering, learning at home, decision-making and collaborating with the community help students' academic, personal and social benefit.

### CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Conceptual framework provides maps which give coherence to empirical inquiry (Kothari, 2004). Conceptual framework thus is meant to provide explanation of the independent variable ‘parent’, how it influences the multidimensional construct as discussed earlier which are physical, social and academic dimensions. The interconnectedness of the three dimensions improves the dependent variable ‘school climate’ when parents intervene the activities within the dimensions, hence, the dependent variable will be a better place for teachers, students and parents as well.

**Figure 1. Model showing an inter-relationship which results to improved school climate**



*Modified from Epstein, 2002.*

### DEFINITION OF OPERATIONAL TERMS

*School climate* - refers to the social, physical and academic environment of the school. It includes all spheres of life such as safety, relationships, teaching and learning and the environment.

### II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Parental involvement in school activities is defined as parents and school staff working together to support and improve learning, development, and health of children and adolescents (Epstein, 2009). It refers to the participation of parents in school-based and home-based activities for the purpose of improving their children’s education (Maluleke, 2014). Parental involvement in students’ education begins at home with the parents providing a safe and healthy environment, appropriate learning experiences, support, and positive attitude about school (Đurišić & Bunijevac, 2017). Studies contend that, engaging parents in their children’s and adolescents’ school life is a promising protective factor (CDC, 2012). However, parents are faced with various challenges which could hinder their involvement in school activities (Masabo, 2017). As explained elsewhere (Brown, 2017), there are several ways to involve parents in school matters

which are communication; where parents receive and respond to written communication, school volunteering for library and lunchroom establishment; and joining PTA (Parent-Teacher Association) and PTO (Parent-Teacher Organization).

The structure and quality of the school environment is believed to play an important role in providing opportunities for students and parental involvement (Goldkind & Farmer, 2013). Parental involvement is certainly a cost-effective and feasible way to improve the culture of teaching and learning. Thus, schools have been urged to provide training for school staff, and teacher education programs should consider parental involvement a core (Lammer, 2007). In another work about community-school partnership in Tanzania (Makwiya and Komba, 2014) reported that, parents were not satisfied with the communication frequency and how they were informed of school matters. More ever, parents were not satisfied with the structure of the school board as people around the school were not involved.

### III. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

#### RESEARCH DESIGN

The study used descriptive research design. The descriptive design was used in preliminary and exploratory studies to allow for the gathering information, summarize, present and interpret, for the purpose of clarification (Orodho, 2004). Qualitative data were gathered through structured questionnaire and interview instruments while quantitative data were gathered through open-ended questionnaire. Both qualitative and quantitative data were collected concurrently and were analysed separately before been compared.

#### LOCATION OF THE STUDY

The study was carried out in four public secondary schools of Ilala Municipality, Dar es Salaam region, Tanzania.

#### TARGET POPULATION

This study targeted Municipal Educational Officer, forms three and four students registered in public secondary schools, heads of schools and parents in Ilala Municipality of Dar es Salaam region, Tanzania. Four schools were randomly selected. The actual number of teacher-population involved in the study was determined with the help of Kerlinger's formula for calculating sample size.

#### SAMPLE SIZE AND SAMPLING TECHNIQUES

Sample size as defined by Kothari (2004) suggests that, there must be an optimum sample size, which is neither too large nor too small. In the secondary schools selected, 40 students were selected, 10 from each school. Moreover, with the help of Kerlinger's formula sample size for teachers was determined. The formula states of 10 to 30% of the target population to be used as a sample. In this study, 30% of the target teacher-population was used. Four secondary schools, four heads of schools, 29 teachers (30 percent of 149 teachers), and 10 parents were randomly selected. Both probability and non-probability techniques were employed. In probability sampling, there is random selection of participants for the study and each respondent in the population had an equal and independent chance of being selected in the sample. Non-probability sampling does not use randomization of the sample population. As such, the subjects have an unknown chance of being selected. Under non-probability technique, purposive sampling was used to select municipal educational officer, school heads, teachers, students and parents.

## **Purposive sampling**

This is also known as deliberate sampling which involves purposive or deliberate selection of units of the population for constituting a sample which represents the universe (Kothari, 2009). The researcher decides whom to involve in the sample based on their typicality. Kombo and Tromp (2006) stated that, the power of purposive sampling lies in selecting participants who provide the richest information for in-depth analysis related to the central issues being studied. Purposive sampling enables the researcher to obtain broadest range of perspectives from respondents who have relevant information about the objectives (Yin, 2011). This method was chosen because it economizes time and costs since the respondents chosen were useful in obtaining the information needed according to the objectives.

## **DATA COLLECTION INSTRUMENTS**

The study employed two instruments for data collection namely; questionnaires and interview guides. Questionnaire is an important tool for data collection particularly in case of big inquiries (Kothari, 2009). The study used closed and open-ended questionnaires in collecting the information from teachers. Participants responded to the typed questions in a questionnaire accordingly as distributed to them, filled them and returned to the researcher. Debois (2016) stated that, questionnaire is the most affordable way of gathering quantitative data and allows for easy analysis of the results, though it may be dishonesty as respondents may not be 100 percent truthful with their answers. Interview guide involves presentation of oral-verbal and reply in terms of oral-verbal responses (Kothari, 2009). Interviews help researcher to gather information that may not be provided in a questionnaire and helps with more accurate screening as the individual being interviewed cannot provide false information such as gender, race or age (DeFranzo, 2014).

## **VALIDITY OF THE INSTRUMENTS**

Validity is defined as the extent to which a concept is accurately measured in quantitative study (Heale, 2015). It means the meaningfulness and accuracy of inferences basing on the results of the research (Orodho, 2009). Thus, it indicates the degree at which an instrument measures what it is supposed to measure. To ensure content validity, each item was examined to ensure it measured the intended objectives. The instruments were presented to two senior researchers separately to assess whether they relate to the content and adequacy. Further corrections and amendments were made and only items which were approved as simple, clear and relevant to the study were in the final test.

## **RELIABILITY OF THE INSTRUMENTS**

Reliability of the research instruments' measurements refers to a degree to which such measuring yields similar outcome over repeated trials. The reliability of this research refers to consistency. This research was consistent in that, the data were measured over the specified time and that, the data measured what was intended to. Triangulation assures the reliability in qualitative studies. The instruments were piloted in two schools which were not included in the full-scale study to ascertain their reliability in collecting the required information. According to Creswell (2014), pilot study is a small-scale preliminary study done to evaluate the validity and reliability of the instrument in terms of time, cost and feasibility, and improve the design before full-scale research project is performed. The study employed test-retest technique of reliability testing in pilot study whereby questionnaires and interview guides were administered twice to four secondary school

teachers and four students with seven days interval. Using Pearson's product correlation formula, the scores were correlated and reliability coefficient of 0.71 was obtained.

### DATA COLLECTION PROCEDURE

Permission and authorization from the respective authorities was obtained before data were collected. The researcher gave simple but relevant and clear instructions on how to fill the questionnaire and then gave the questionnaires to selected heads of schools, teachers and students and asked them to respond by carefully filling the questionnaires. The procedure was repeated to each of the selected school. The researcher arranged for separate meetings with parents, one after another on separate occasions, and after a brief introduction, she conducted the interview by reading out all the questions systematically, giving clarification where deemed necessary.

### METHODS OF DATA ANALYSIS

Data from closed-ended items in the questionnaires were coded using SPSS (Statistical Package for Social Sciences) version 20.0, analyzed using descriptive statistics and specifically presented in frequencies, percentages, tables, pie chart, bar graphs and histograms. Qualitative data obtained from open-ended questions and structured interviews were coded using content analysis into categories, themes and summarization of data.

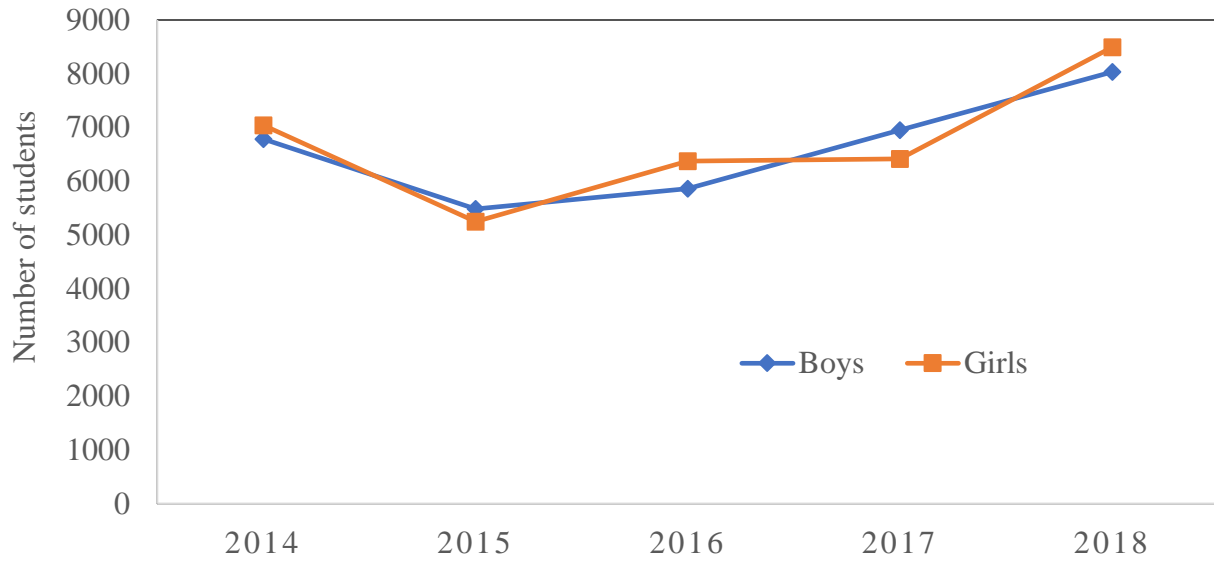
### ETHICAL CONSIDERATION

The current study followed acceptable research ethics as stipulated in literature (Creswell, 2014). Permission was obtained from ethical committee of St. Augustine University of Tanzania. Confidentiality, anonymity, and privacy of the information shared, as well as safety of the respondents were ensured unconditionally.

### IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Collected data were analyzed and interpreted basing on the research objective and question tailored to assess students' performance, and strategies and challenges faced by school leaders to ameliorate parental involvement in school matters after introduction of fee-free education policy. Data were collected from students and teachers using questionnaire while structured interview was used to obtain information from heads of schools and parents. Archived data was extracted retrospectively from the database of Ilala Municipality, Dar es Salaam region. Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics. The findings of the study are presented.

**Figure 1: Form I enrollment in public secondary schools; 2014- 2018**



The results in figure 1 above demonstrate a slight increase in students’ enrolment in Form I in public secondary schools located in Ilala Municipality from 7,042 to 8,495 (girls) and from 6,787 to 8,034 (boys) in 2014 and 2018 respectively. However, it was not immediately clear whether the increase was directly correlated to the introduction of the fee-free education policy.

The study also examined the number of students who managed to complete Form IV secondary education in such schools during a four-year period post introduction of fee-free education policy.

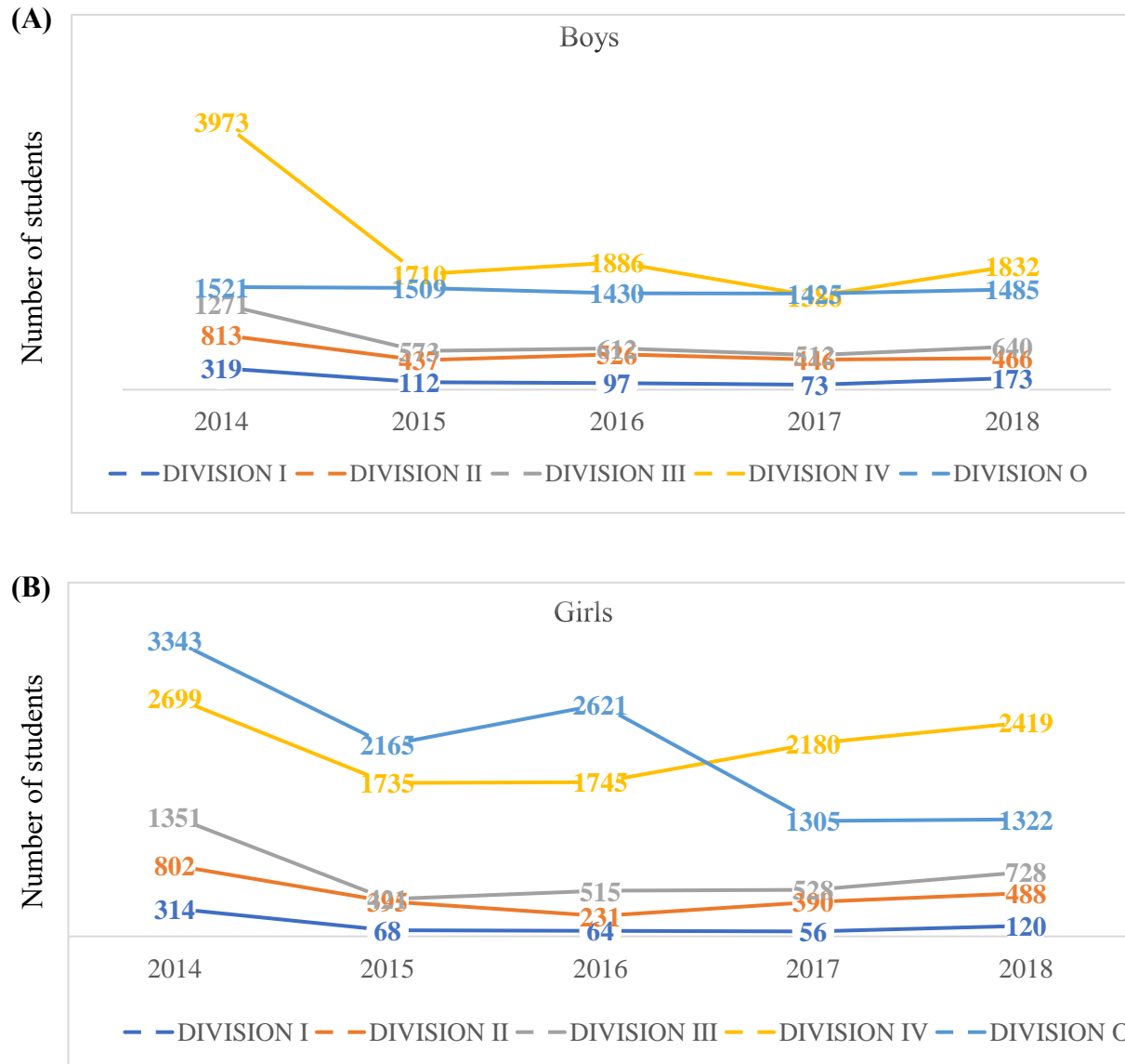
**Table 1: Number of students who completed Form IV in public secondary schools; 2014-2018**

Year	Boys		Girls		Total	% Increase
	Number	%	Number	%		
2014	7897	48.1	5509	51.9	13406	48
2015	4341	47.6	4784	52.4	9125	-
2016	4551	46.8	5176	53.2	9727	6
2017	3842	46.3	4459	53.7	8301	-
2018	4591	47.5	5083	52.5	9674	14



When compared to the number of students who enrolled in Form I four years past (figure 1 above), the results in table 1 indicate a decline in number of students who completed Form IV education in public secondary school in Ilala Municipality. This is contrary to what was expected by majority following introduction and implementation of the fee-free education policy.

**Figure 2: Students’ performance in Form IV Examinations in public secondary schools; in Ilala Municipality, Dar es Salaam; 2014-2018**

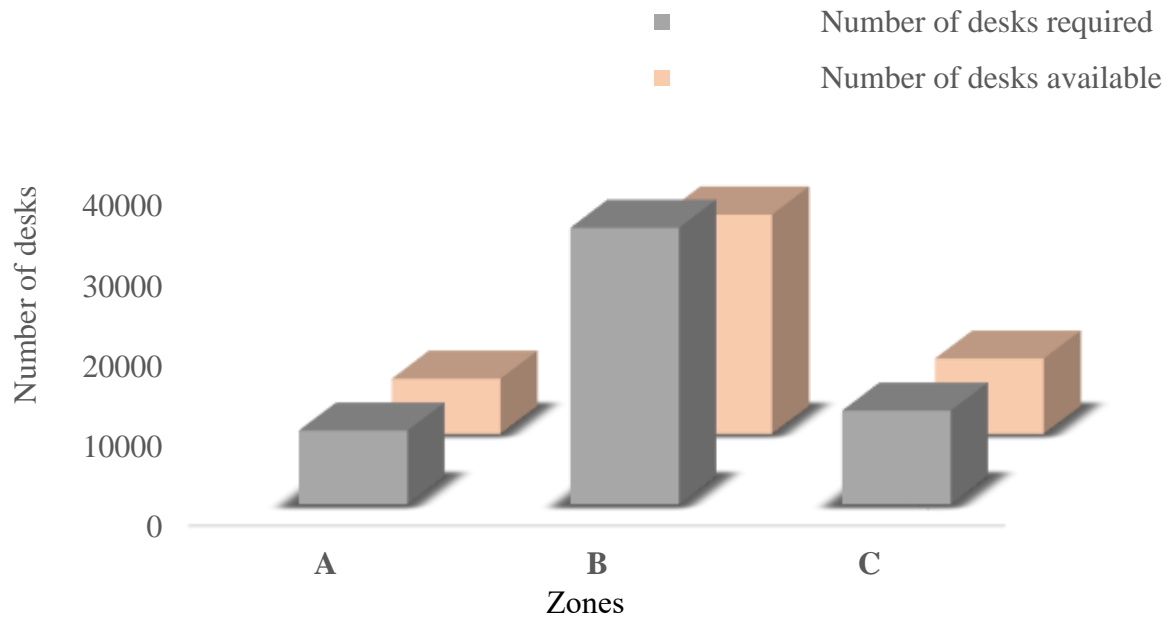


The results in figure 2 above demonstrate that no significant change has taken place in terms of students’ academic performance in Form IV National Examinations during the first four years of implementation of fee-free education policy. Many students in public secondary schools still perform poorly. Students scoring Divisions O and IV made up almost 60% of total number of

students completing Form IV secondary education. This indicates that, introduction and implementation of fee-free education policy in Tanzania has not improved students' academic performance in public secondary schools.

Adequate ratio of desks per students, availability of dormitories/ hostels for students especially girls, and presence of libraries with sufficiently number of required textbooks are among the well-established factors for promoting students' academic achievement. The study also examined these factors in the surveyed public secondary schools.

**Figure 3: Availability of desks in public secondary schools of Ilala Municipality by zones**



According to the results in figure 3 above, all public secondary schools in the three educational zones of Ilala Municipality in the city of Dar es Salaam have adequate number of desks. Since no shortage of desks in these schools, a need to search for a possible factor causing poor performance by students is therefore imperative.

**Table 2: Availability of dormitories/hostels in public secondary schools by zones, 2018**

Zones	Number of Schools	Number of dormitories/hostels			% Deficit
		Required	Available	Deficit	
A	7	8	-	8	100
B	33	92	30	62	67
C	11	19	8	11	58
<b>Total</b>	<b>51</b>	<b>119</b>	<b>38</b>	<b>81</b>	<b>68</b>

We found that, all public secondary schools in all three educational zones of Ilala Municipality in Dar es Salaam region are faced with serious shortage of dormitories/ hostels for students to reside. Of the eight required dormitories/ hostels in zone A, none was present, while zones B and C were short of 62 and 11 dormitories/ hostels respectively. It is worth to note that, students who reside in distant areas far from their schools spend many hours to commute to, and from the schools and are faced with many challenges posed by business and daily activities in large cities.

**Table 3: Availability of libraries in public secondary schools by zones, 2018**

Division	Number of schools	Number of libraries			% Deficit
		Required	Available	Deficit	
A	7	7	-	7	100
B	33	33	3	30	91
C	11	11	5	6	55
<b>Total</b>	<b>51</b>	<b>51</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>43</b>	<b>84</b>

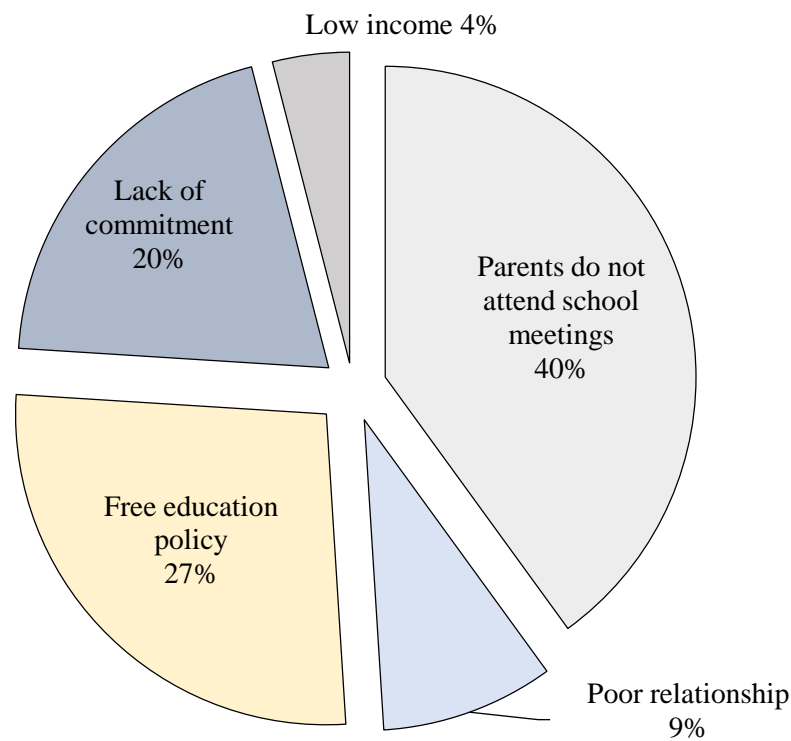
We also observed in the current study that, most public secondary schools in the three educational zones of Ilala Municipality in Dar es Salaam region -Tanzania do not have a library, and when present, they did not have sufficiently number of required textbooks. As it was the case for

dormitories/ hostels, there were no available libraries in all schools of educational zone A, while zones B and C suffered 91% and 55% deficits respectively. Garshberg (2014) reported that, poor and insufficient school infrastructure negatively impacts students’ learning and schooling outcome.

It has been observed that, parents are highly involved in school activities for future expectations that their children will be more educated than them, hence, be successful in their lives. This was complimented by one of the interviewees in the current study who remarked that;

*‘I am somehow educated, and I want my children to go to schools which can provide quality education because I know I am investing to my child for the future. Even if I die, I will have left my child with richness. I want my children to succeed that is why I always visit the school to meet their teachers’.*

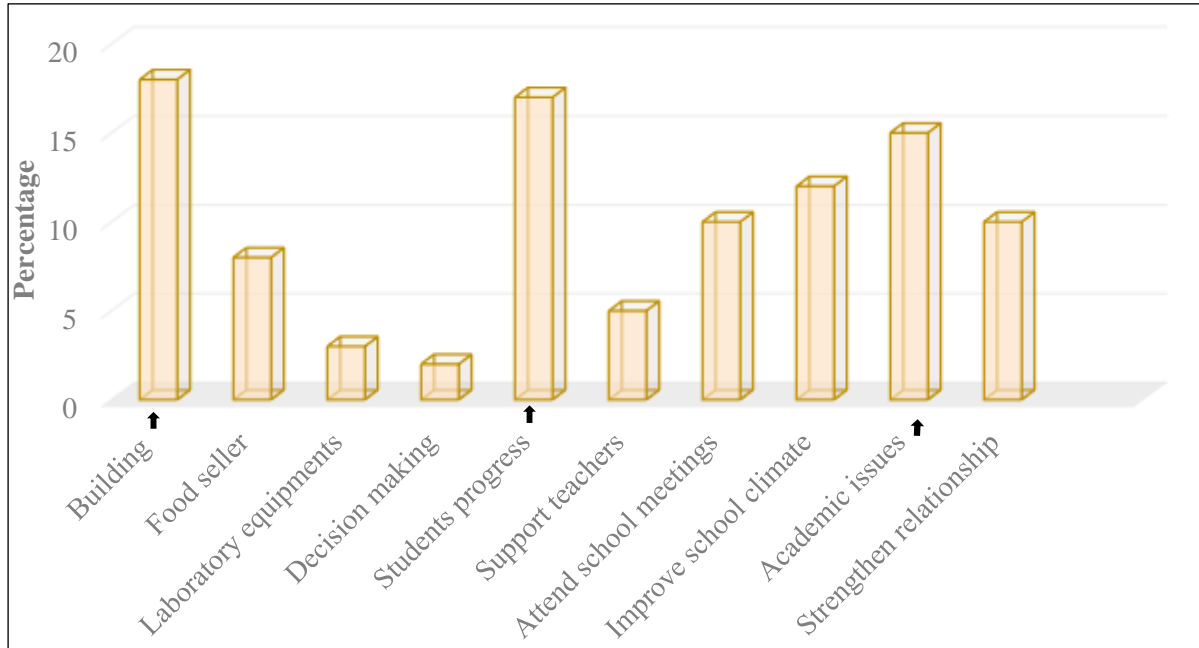
**Figure 4: Challenges facing school heads in involving parents in school activities**



There are many challenges facing school heads in involving parents in school matters as observed previously due to parents not showing interest to involve in school activities especially in urban settings (Berg & Noort, 2011). In addition, we found in this study that parents not attending school meetings, lack of commitment and free education policy are among major challenges facing school heads in involving parents in school activities. When interviewed, 77% of the study

participants strongly suggested that the level of parental involvement should be uplifted to enhance school climate for better students’ academic performance.

**Figure 5: Activities suggested by students for their parents to be involved in their school**



On the other hand, heads of schools complained that parents do not give adequate attention to matters concerned with their children’s education as explained by one interviewee who said that;

*‘Parents are not serious, when you call them to school, they send housemaids or their elder brother or sister to respond to the call, what can you discuss with them? we just send them back to tell the parents to come themselves’.*

## V. SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

It is revealed in this study that, despite slight increase in students’ enrolment to public secondary schools in Ilala Municipality of Dar es Salaam- Tanzania, fee-free education policy has not improved students’ academic achievement, a single most important factor measured when assessing quality of education. More ever, this policy was blamed as a factor which took away parents’ interest to involve themselves in school matters. Fee-free education policy is also reported to have worsened the interpersonal relationship among teachers, parents and students. Parental involvement in school activities is of paramount importance to students’ academic endeavor and school climate at its entirety. Lack of dormitories/ hostels and well-equipped libraries with enough textbooks and resource materials are the major factors causing poor academic performance by students in their final examinations in public secondary schools. Despite implementation of fee-free education policy, level of parental involvement should be uplifted to promote school climate, hence, improved students’ academic achievement.

## CONCLUSION

Providing free education to all children significantly lessens the burden shouldered by parents in educating their children. However, this should not in any way be a replacement for parental involvement in school matters. The role of parental involvement in school activities is crucial in building effective school climate and contributes a lot to students' performance. Parents are expected to be attending not just school meetings, but also become active in all school matters such as students' academic achievement and disciplinary issues. As a negative impact, it has been noted that, implementation of the fee-free education policy in public schools has somehow made parents feel less concerned with school activities. However, this is a wrong notion and incorrect perception of the policy and it should be discouraged. Parental training, seminars and workshops, writing letters to parents, communication through phone, mobilization activities and using government or political leaders are among the suggested means for sensitizing parents to take part in shaping up the school climate. Teachers, students and parents should work in harmony and the relationship among them should be strengthened to improve students' academic performance. Parents also need to understand their potential and responsibility in their students' academic life in school too. As well, policy makers/government and parents should consider building dormitories/ hostels for students and libraries so that students will have a better studying environment.

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