

SCHOOL-RELATED VARIABLES AND IMPLEMENTATION OF FREE EDUCATION POLICY IN PUBLIC SECONDARY SCHOOLS IN JALINGO EDUCATION ZONE, TARABA STATE, NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT: This study investigated the relationship between selected school-related variables and the implementation of Free Education Policy in public secondary schools in Jalingo Education Zone, Taraba State, Nigeria. Two specific objectives, two research questions, and two null hypotheses guided the study. A correlational research design was adopted. The population comprised 1,776 teachers drawn from 43 public secondary schools in Jalingo Education Zone, consisting of 1,432 teachers from Jalingo Local Government Area and 344 teachers from Ardo-Kola Local Government Area. A sample of 317 teachers was determined using the Krejcie and Morgan sample size determination table. Two researcher-developed questionnaires, namely the School-Related Variables Questionnaire (SRVQ) and Free Education Policy Questionnaire (FEPQ), were used for data collection. The instruments were validated by three experts from the Faculty of Education, while reliability was established using Cronbach's alpha, yielding reliability coefficients of 0.75 for the SRVQ and 0.77 for the FEPQ. Data were analyzed using mean, standard deviation, and Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient to answer the research questions, while simple linear regression was used to test the null hypotheses at the 0.05 level of significance. The findings revealed a very strong positive relationship between teacher motivation and Free Education Policy ($r = .888$) and a moderate positive relationship between students' enrollment and Free Education Policy ($r = .518$). The regression results further showed that teacher motivation and students' enrollment each had a statistically significant positive relationship with Free Education Policy. The study concluded that teacher motivation and students' enrollment are important school-related factors associated with the implementation of Free Education Policy in public secondary schools in Jalingo Education Zone. It was recommended, among others, that the Taraba State Government should strengthen teacher motivation through prompt payment of salaries, professional development opportunities, timely promotion, and appropriate incentives, while adequate planning, recruitment of qualified teachers, and provision of school facilities should accompany increasing student enrollment.

Index Terms—School-related variables, teacher motivation, students' enrollment, free education policy, public secondary schools.

INTRODUCTION

Free education policy is an important educational intervention designed to reduce financial barriers to schooling and promote equitable access to education. The policy is particularly significant in contexts where household income and socio-economic inequalities restrict children's opportunities to attend and remain in school. By reducing or removing tuition-related costs, free education policies are expected to increase access to schooling, promote inclusion, and contribute to the development of human capital. These objectives are consistent with the broader international commitment to inclusive and equitable quality education under Sustainable Development Goal 4 (UNESCO, 2017).

Although free education policies can improve access to education, their implementation may create additional demands on the existing school system. An increase in enrollment can result in overcrowded classrooms, increased teacher workload, inadequate instructional materials, and pressure on existing physical facilities. Consequently, the success of free education cannot be determined only by the removal of financial barriers; it also depends on the capacity of schools

to accommodate and effectively manage the increasing number of learners. Adequate funding, qualified teachers, instructional resources, infrastructure, and effective school management are therefore important to sustainable policy implementation.

School-related variables constitute conditions within the school environment that can influence teaching, learning, administration, and the implementation of educational policies. Such variables may include teacher motivation, students' enrollment, students' retention, instructional materials, physical facilities, and other school-level factors. In the present study, however, attention is specifically given to teacher motivation and students' enrollment as the school-related variables examined in relation to Free Education Policy.

Teacher motivation refers to the factors that encourage teachers to perform their professional responsibilities with commitment, enthusiasm, and effectiveness. Motivation may arise from both intrinsic and extrinsic factors. Salary, promotion, recognition, opportunities for professional development, supportive working conditions, and job security may influence teachers' willingness to perform their duties effectively. In the context of free education, teacher motivation is particularly important because increased enrollment may place additional demands on teachers. Where teachers are adequately motivated, they may be better positioned to cope with increased workloads and contribute to the effective implementation of educational programmes.

Students' enrollment is another important school-related variable associated with free education. The removal or reduction of school fees can encourage children from economically disadvantaged households to enroll in school. Increased enrollment may therefore serve as an indication that financial barriers to education are being reduced. However, rapid enrollment growth without corresponding increases in teachers, classrooms, instructional materials, and other resources can create pressure on schools and potentially affect the quality of education.

The implementation of Free Education Policy in Taraba State therefore needs to be considered in relation to the conditions existing within public secondary schools. The effectiveness of the policy depends not only on government declaration but also on the ability of schools to provide an environment in which teachers can function effectively and students can access educational opportunities. Teacher motivation and students' enrollment are consequently relevant factors for examining the implementation of the policy.

Empirical studies have reported different relationships between free education policies, teacher motivation, and enrollment. Toto (2021), for example, investigated the influence of Free Education Policy on teacher motivation in public secondary schools in Dodoma Municipality, Tanzania, and reported that inadequate funding, overcrowded classrooms, poor working conditions, and limited policy awareness negatively affected teacher motivation. In contrast, Oni and Soji-Oni (2022) reported a significant positive relationship between teacher motivation and teaching effectiveness in Nigerian public secondary schools. Abubakar (2024) also reported a significant association between teacher motivation and students' outcomes in Nigerian public and private secondary schools.

With respect to enrollment, Ndolo et al. (2016) reported that the implementation of Free Secondary Education Policy in Kenya resulted in increased student enrollment. Pallegedara and Takashi (2019) also found that the implementation of Universal Secondary Education Policy in Uganda was associated with increased secondary school enrollment, particularly among economically disadvantaged households. Similarly, Tweve (2019) reported increased enrollment following the introduction of free education in secondary schools in Ubungu District, Tanzania, although the schools experienced resource-related challenges.

These studies indicate that teacher motivation and student enrollment are important issues in the implementation of free education. However, evidence relating these school-related variables specifically to the implementation of Free Education Policy in public secondary schools in Jalingo Education Zone remains limited. This study was therefore undertaken to examine the relationship between teacher motivation, students' enrollment, and the implementation of Free Education Policy in public secondary schools in Jalingo Education Zone, Taraba State, Nigeria.

NEED OF THE STUDY

The Free Education Policy introduced by the Taraba State Government in July 2023 was intended to improve access to secondary education and reduce financial barriers to schooling. Following the implementation of the policy, an increase in

student enrollment has been observed in public secondary schools. However, increased access may create challenges where the expansion of enrollment is not accompanied by corresponding improvements in school resources and teacher support.

The continued presence of overcrowded classrooms, inadequate teaching resources, and insufficient physical facilities may affect the quality of education provided under the policy. Increased enrollment may also place additional demands on teachers, thereby making teacher motivation an important consideration in the effective implementation of the policy. Where teachers are not adequately supported, increased workload and challenging working conditions may affect their commitment and effectiveness.

Government and relevant educational authorities have made efforts to improve educational provision in the state. Nevertheless, concerns remain regarding the adequacy of resources required to support increasing enrollment and ensure effective teaching and learning. The situation creates a need to examine school-related factors that are associated with the implementation of Free Education Policy.

It is against this background that this study investigated the relationship between teacher motivation, students' enrollment, and the implementation of Free Education Policy in public secondary schools in Jalingo Education Zone, Taraba State, Nigeria.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The main purpose of this study was to investigate the relationship between selected school-related variables and the implementation of Free Education Policy in public secondary schools in Jalingo Education Zone, Taraba State, Nigeria. Specifically, the study sought to:

1. Determine the relationship between teacher motivation and the implementation of Free Education Policy in public secondary schools in Jalingo Education Zone, Taraba State, Nigeria.
2. Determine the relationship between students' enrollment and the implementation of Free Education Policy in public secondary schools in Jalingo Education Zone, Taraba State, Nigeria.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The following research questions guided the study:

1. What relationship exists between teacher motivation and the implementation of Free Education Policy in public secondary schools in Jalingo Education Zone, Taraba State, Nigeria?
2. What relationship exists between students' enrollment and the implementation of Free Education Policy in public secondary schools in Jalingo Education Zone, Taraba State, Nigeria?

RESEARCH HYPOTHESES

The following null hypotheses were formulated and tested at the 0.05 level of significance:

H₀₁: There is no significant relationship between teacher motivation and the implementation of Free Education Policy in public secondary schools in Jalingo Education Zone, Taraba State, Nigeria.

H₀₂: There is no significant relationship between students' enrollment and the implementation of Free Education Policy in public secondary schools in Jalingo Education Zone, Taraba State, Nigeria.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Design

A correlational research design was adopted for the study. The design was considered appropriate because the study sought to determine the nature, direction, and strength of the relationships between selected school-related variables and the implementation of Free Education Policy without manipulating the variables.

3.2 Population and Sample

The population of the study comprised 1,776 teachers drawn from 43 public secondary schools in Jalingo Education Zone, Taraba State. The population consisted of 1,432 teachers from Jalingo Local Government Area and 344 teachers from Ardo-Kola Local Government Area. A sample of 317 teachers was determined using the Krejcie and Morgan sample size determination table.

3.3 Instrument for Data Collection

Two researcher-developed questionnaires were used for data collection. They were the School-Related Variables Questionnaire (SRVQ) and the Free Education Policy Questionnaire (FEPQ). The SRVQ was designed to obtain information on the selected school-related variables, particularly teacher motivation and students' enrollment, while the FEPQ was designed to obtain information relating to the implementation of Free Education Policy in public secondary schools.

3.4 Validity and Reliability of the Instruments

The instruments were subjected to validation by three experts from the Faculty of Education. The validators examined the instruments in terms of relevance, clarity, appropriateness, and adequacy of the items in relation to the objectives of the study.

The reliability of the instruments was established using the Cronbach alpha method. The SRVQ yielded a reliability coefficient of 0.75, while the FEPQ yielded a reliability coefficient of 0.77. The coefficients indicated acceptable internal consistency for the instruments.

3.5 Data Collection

Primary data were collected from the sampled teachers using the two researcher-developed questionnaires. The completed questionnaires constituted the data used for the analysis of the study.

3.6 Data Analysis Techniques

Mean, standard deviation, and Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient were used to analyze the data for answering the research questions. Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient was used to determine the direction and strength of the relationships between the variables. Simple linear regression was used to test the null hypotheses at the 0.05 level of significance.

3.7 Theoretical Framework

The study was anchored on Systems Theory. Systems Theory views an organization as a system made up of interrelated components that work together toward the achievement of common goals. In the context of education, the school can be regarded as a system comprising teachers, students, administrators, facilities, instructional resources, and other components whose activities are interconnected.

The relevance of Systems Theory to this study lies in its emphasis on the interdependence of school-related factors. Teacher motivation and students' enrollment do not operate in isolation. An increase in enrollment, for example, can affect teacher workload and the demand for instructional resources, while teacher motivation can influence the extent to

which teachers respond effectively to increased demands within the school system. The effective implementation of Free Education Policy can therefore be understood as partly dependent on how the different components of the school system interact and function together.

In this study, teacher motivation and students' enrollment were considered selected school-related variables, while the implementation of Free Education Policy constituted the dependent variable. The theoretical perspective therefore provides a basis for examining whether variations in selected school-related variables are associated with differences in the implementation of Free Education Policy.

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Research Question One: What relationship exists between teacher motivation and the implementation of Free Education Policy in public secondary schools in Jalingo Education Zone, Taraba State, Nigeria?

Table 1: Mean, Standard Deviation and Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient of the Relationship between Teacher Motivation and Free Education Policy

Variables	Mean	Std. Deviation	PPMC Coefficient (r)
TM	16.98	1.58	.888
FEP	17.82	1.74	

Source: Field Survey, 2026

Table 1 shows that teacher motivation had a mean score of 16.98 with a standard deviation of 1.58, while Free Education Policy had a mean score of 17.82 with a standard deviation of 1.74. The Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient of .888 indicates a very strong positive relationship between teacher motivation and the implementation of Free Education Policy in public secondary schools in Jalingo Education Zone, Taraba State, Nigeria.

Research Question Two: What relationship exists between students' enrollment and the implementation of Free Education Policy in public secondary schools in Jalingo Education Zone, Taraba State, Nigeria?

Table
Mean, Standard Deviation and Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient of the Relationship between Students' Enrollment and Free Education Policy

Table 2: Mean, Standard Deviation, and PPMC Coefficient of the relationship between students' enrollment relate with Free Education Policy of Public Secondary Schools in Jalingo Education Zone, Taraba State, Nigeria

Variables	Mean	Std. Deviation	PPMC Coefficient (r)
SE	18.90	1.54	.518**
FEP	17.65	1.48	

Source: Field Survey, 2026

Table 2 shows that students' enrollment had a mean score of 18.90 with a standard deviation of 1.54, while Free Education Policy had a mean score of 17.65 with a standard deviation of 1.48. The Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient of .518 indicates a moderate positive relationship between students' enrollment and the implementation of Free Education Policy in public secondary schools in Jalingo Education Zone, Taraba State, Nigeria.

Test of Hypothesis One

H₀₁: There is no significant relationship between teacher motivation and the implementation of Free Education Policy in public secondary schools in Jalingo Education Zone, Taraba State, Nigeria.

Table 3: Regression Coefficient of Teacher Motivation and Free Education Policy

Predictor	B	SE	B	T	Sig.
	0.44	0.5	0.57	8.78	.000
TM	16.98				
FEP	17.82				

Source: Fieldwork (2026)

Table 3 shows that teacher motivation had a positive and statistically significant relationship with the implementation of Free Education Policy ($\beta = .57$, $t = 8.78$, $p < .001$). The unstandardized coefficient ($B = 0.44$) indicates that a one-unit increase in teacher motivation was associated with an estimated 0.44-unit increase in the Free Education Policy score. Since the reported p-value is less than the 0.05 level of significance, the null hypothesis was rejected. Therefore, there was a statistically significant positive relationship between teacher motivation and the implementation of Free Education Policy in public secondary schools in Jalingo Education Zone, Taraba State, Nigeria.

Test of Hypothesis Two

H₀₂: There is no significant relationship between students' enrollment and the implementation of Free Education Policy in public secondary schools in Jalingo Education Zone, Taraba State, Nigeria.

Table 4: Regression Coefficient of Students' Enrollment and Free Education Policy

Predictor	B	SE	β	t	Sig.
	0.39	0.66	.63	11.88	.000
SE	18.90				
FEP	17.65				

Source: Fieldwork (2026)

Table 4 shows that students' enrollment had a positive and statistically significant relationship with the implementation of Free Education Policy ($\beta = .63$, $t = 11.88$, $p < .001$). The unstandardized coefficient ($B = 0.39$) indicates that a one-unit increase in students' enrollment was associated with an estimated 0.39-unit increase in the Free Education Policy score. Since the reported p-value is less than the 0.05 level of significance, the null hypothesis was rejected. Therefore, there was a statistically significant positive relationship between students' enrollment and the implementation of Free Education Policy in public secondary schools in Jalingo Education Zone, Taraba State, Nigeria.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

Relationship between Teacher Motivation and Free Education Policy

The finding of the study revealed a very strong positive relationship between teacher motivation and the implementation of Free Education Policy in public secondary schools in Jalingo Education Zone, Taraba State, Nigeria. The result further showed that the relationship was statistically significant. This implies that teacher motivation is an important school-related factor associated with the implementation of Free Education Policy.

The finding differs from that of Toto (2021), who investigated the influence of Free Education Policy on teacher motivation in public secondary schools in Dodoma Municipality, Tanzania. Toto reported that the implementation of the policy was associated with teacher demotivation arising from inadequate funding, overcrowded classrooms, poor working

conditions, and limited policy awareness. The difference between the two findings may be associated with differences in the educational and policy contexts in which the studies were conducted.

The present finding is consistent with Oni and Soji-Oni (2022), who examined motivational factors and teaching effectiveness in Nigerian public secondary schools and reported a significant positive relationship between teacher motivation and teaching effectiveness. The finding is also consistent with Abubakar (2024), who reported a significant relationship between teacher motivation and students' outcomes in Nigerian public and private secondary schools. These findings suggest that supporting teachers through appropriate remuneration, professional development, recognition, and favourable working conditions may strengthen their capacity to contribute to educational policy implementation.

Relationship between Students' Enrollment and Free Education Policy

The finding of the study revealed a moderate positive relationship between students' enrollment and the implementation of Free Education Policy in public secondary schools in Jalingo Education Zone, Taraba State, Nigeria. The hypothesis test further showed that the relationship was statistically significant. This suggests that student enrollment is an important school-related factor associated with the implementation of Free Education Policy.

The finding agrees with Ndolo et al. (2016), who examined the impact of Free Secondary Education Policy on access to secondary education in Kenya and reported a significant increase in student enrollment following implementation of the policy. Similarly, Pallegedara and Takashi (2019) found that the Universal Secondary Education Policy in Uganda was associated with increased secondary school enrollment, particularly among economically disadvantaged households. Tweve (2019) also reported increased student enrollment following the introduction of free education in secondary schools in Ubungu District, Tanzania.

The consistency between the present finding and these previous studies indicates that reducing financial barriers to secondary education can contribute to increased enrollment. However, increasing enrollment also creates a need for corresponding investment in teachers, classrooms, instructional materials, and other educational resources to ensure that increased access does not undermine educational quality.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

The following findings emerged from the study:

1. There was a very strong positive relationship between teacher motivation and the implementation of Free Education Policy in public secondary schools in Jalingo Education Zone, Taraba State, Nigeria. The relationship was statistically significant; consequently, the first null hypothesis was rejected.
2. There was a moderate positive relationship between students' enrollment and the implementation of Free Education Policy in public secondary schools in Jalingo Education Zone, Taraba State, Nigeria. The relationship was statistically significant; consequently, the second null hypothesis was rejected.

CONCLUSION

Based on the findings of the study, it was concluded that selected school-related variables, specifically teacher motivation and students' enrollment, have significant positive relationships with the implementation of Free Education Policy in public secondary schools in Jalingo Education Zone, Taraba State, Nigeria. The findings indicate that the effectiveness of free education extends beyond the removal of financial barriers and is associated with the conditions under which schools operate. Adequate attention to teacher motivation and the management of increasing student enrollment is therefore important for sustaining the implementation of Free Education Policy.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations were made:

1. The Taraba State Government, through the Ministry of Education and the Post Primary Schools Management Board (PPSMB), should strengthen teacher motivation by ensuring prompt payment of salaries,

providing opportunities for professional development, implementing promotions as and when due, and introducing appropriate incentive packages to support effective implementation of Free Education Policy.

2. The Taraba State Government and relevant educational authorities should adequately plan for increasing student enrollment under the Free Education Policy by recruiting additional qualified teachers, expanding classrooms and other school facilities, and providing sufficient instructional and financial resources to accommodate the growing student population.

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