



## EDUCATION FACT SHEET - ZAMBIA

<b>In Brief</b>	<p><b>Summary</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Zambia Population: 20.6 million (2022)</li> <li>● Zambia Size: 752,618 sq km/290,587 sq mi</li> </ul> <p><b>National curriculum:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Zambia follows a national curriculum with formal exams at the end of Grades 7, 9, and 12. Students must pass these exams to progress to the next grade or pursue tertiary education.</li> </ul> <p><b>Literacy Rate:</b> 87.5% (as of 2020, sourced from Trading Economics)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Youth Literacy Rate: 93.2% (as of 2020)</li> <li>● Female Youth Literacy Rate: 92.8% (as of 2020, Global Economy) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ NB: Despite high literacy rates, nearly 25% of children are not attending school.</li> </ul> </li> </ul> <p><b>Total number of years in public schools 12;</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Primary - 7</li> <li>● Lower Secondary - 2</li> <li>● Upper Secondary - 3</li> </ul> <p><b>Language of Instruction:</b> Local language used up to grade 4, after which instruction is in English.</p> <p><b>High School Leaving Exams:</b> Yes</p> <p><b>Date of Exams:</b> November each year</p>
<b>Education Overview</b>	<p><b>Government investment in education:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● In Zambia's 2023 budget, government investment in education as a percentage of GDP is 4.4%. Although this figure has increased following a previous downward trend, it still represents only 13.9% of the total budget, which falls well below agreed international standards.</li> </ul> <p><b>Teacher-pupil ratio:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● According to the 2017 Index Mundi, the teacher-pupil ratio in Zambia stands at 42.06, which is notably higher compared to the Southern African Development Community (SADC) average of 34.86.</li> </ul> <p><b>Entering primary school having attended preschool:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● In 2013, the Education for All (EFA) report indicated that only 27% of students in Zambia enter primary school having attended preschool.</li> </ul> <p><b>Net attendance in primary school:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● As of 2018, UNICEF reported that the net attendance rate in primary schools in Zambia is 84%. It's worth noting that primary education is free, but expenses such as uniforms and stationery are not covered.</li> </ul> <p><b>Net attendance in lower secondary schools:</b></p>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● According to UNICEF's 2018 data, the net attendance rate for lower secondary schools in Zambia is 46%.</li> </ul> <p><b>Net attendance in upper secondary schools:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● In 2018, UNICEF reported that the percentage net attendance rate for upper secondary schools in Zambia is 29%.</li> </ul> <p><b>Numbers of university students:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● In 2021, the percentage of university students (including public and private institutions) among 18-25 year-olds was 3.20%."</li> </ul>
<p><b>School System</b></p>	<p>There are four years of optional preschool for children aged 2 to 6, with nearly 100% of the provision being private. This is followed by seven years of basic primary education for children aged 7 to 13.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Note: Lower and upper secondary education gradually merge into the same school system.</li> </ul> <p>Advancement from one educational level to another depends on national exams and is not automatic. The government oversees this process at the end of Grades 7, 9, and 12. The Grade 7 exam allows the allocation of limited spaces by excluding children who do not achieve the required marks. Although it is possible to retake a year, many children from disadvantaged backgrounds need more motivation to continue.</p> <p>Primary education is free, except for uniforms and stationery. The current government has made secondary education accessible up to Grade 12 and has deployed a significantly higher number of teachers. While there is a program to construct more schools, progress has needed to be faster, resulting in even more overcrowded classrooms. Teaching methods have remained stagnant over time, leading to academic struggles for many children, especially in rural communities.</p> <p>Only a small percentage of students (around 3.2%) manage to attend university, even if they get outstanding grades. The previous administration converted several former colleges into universities, increasing the number of available university slots. There are currently nine government universities and 53 accredited private universities, including online institutions, recognized by the Zambia Higher Education Authority. It's possible to secure a loan for studying at one of Zambia's government universities, but the competition for these loans is intense and contingent on achieving exceptional grades. Very few private universities offer full scholarships. Due to insufficient investment in public universities, resources, including accommodation, still need to be updated.</p> <p>The Technical Education, Vocational, and Entrepreneurship Training Authority (TEVETA) provides an alternative to tertiary education. While courses are available, access remains challenging for many, and there is criticism that their programs need to impart the necessary workplace skills.</p>

**Language of Tuition**

In the first four grades, children are taught in their local language. Afterward, the medium of instruction switches to English. However, children in community schools often continue conversing in their local languages despite English being the language of instruction. Consequently, their fluency in English is often less developed. Government and private schools, on the other hand, typically enforce the use of English throughout the school day. Nevertheless, the reality is that not all students who complete Grade 12 achieve fluency in English.

**School Leaving Exams**

The basis of the scoring system for the Examinations Council of Zambia (ECZ) exams offered by all government schools, administered at the end of Grade 12, is the six highest subject scores, including English Language. This grading system is used for university admissions in Zambia. The gold standard is achieving 6 points.

Most students typically take eight subjects, although a student may opt for nine subjects occasionally. Some students taking fewer subjects may have been compelled to do so due to scheduling constraints, preventing testing certain subjects on the designated day at their school.

To earn the school certificate, a student must attain a minimum of five passes at the credit grade or above. Approximately 28% of students who begin their education in the government school system complete Grade 12, and roughly half of these students receive the school certificate.

In most high schools (upper secondary), students are offered the choice to study pure (individual) sciences and additional maths. The curriculum delves deeper into each subject but remains predominantly theoretical due to limited resources in school laboratories. Since many competitive high schools are single-sex, it's common for girls' schools not to offer pure sciences and additional maths, resulting in fewer girls pursuing STEM subjects at the university level.

The IGCSE and GCE O-level grading systems are alternative international testing systems administered by the University of Cambridge (UK). Some schools, primarily private ones, opt for this examination system over ECZ.

The table below shows a comparison of the scoring systems.

**Scoring System for ECZ and iGCSE**

<i>ECZ % Description</i>	<i>Grade/ Points</i>	<i>Description</i>	<i>iGCSE/GCE%</i>	<i>Grade/ Points</i>
85 - 100 <i>Distinction</i>	1 – A*	<i>Distinction</i>	90 - 100	1 - A*
75 - 84 <i>Distinction</i>	1 – A	<i>Distinction</i>	80 - 89	2 - A
70 - 74 <i>Merit</i>	2 – B*	<i>Merit</i>	70 - 79	3 - B
65 - 69 <i>Merit</i>	3 – B	<i>Merit</i>	70 - 79	3 - B
60 - 64 <i>Credit</i>	4 – C*	<i>Credit</i>	60 - 69	4 - C
55 - 59 <i>Credit</i>	5 – C	<i>Credit</i>	60 - 69	4 - C

	<p>50 - 54      6 - D*      Satisfactory      50 - 59      5 - D Satisfactory</p> <p>45 - 49      7 - D      Satisfactory      40 - 49      6 - E Satisfactory</p> <p>40 - 44      8 - E      Unsatisfactory      30 - 39      7 - F Fail</p> <p>Below 40      9 - F</p> <p><i>A-levels were removed from the school curriculum during the 1970s when ECZ exams started and have never been reintroduced. The first year of many degrees includes A-levels, though students are not tested through formal A-level routes.</i></p>
<p><b>Available Schools</b></p>	<p>The government allocates primary and secondary day school funding. Additionally, each province hosts boarding schools that selectively admit high-achieving students, complemented by two national schools, one situated in the capital and the other in the Southern Province. Traditionally, candidates are invited to join these schools based on their Grade 9 results, but there is a growing trend to consider Grade 7 results as well, with an expanded intake. Notably, these boarding schools adhere to a low-cost model, maintaining tuition fees at the same rate as standard secondary schools. They make concerted efforts to keep boarding fees as affordable as possible. However, it remains challenging for the most underprivileged students to attend without some form of sponsorship.</p> <p>To boost the educational infrastructure, the Zambian government has embarked on an expansion initiative, creating an additional 600,000 school placements since 2000, primarily through establishing community schools. These community-driven institutions frequently emerge in areas where government schools are absent, particularly in rural regions. The quality of community schools varies significantly, with many staffed by educators who have only completed Grade 7. Most community schools end at Grade 7, although a few extend to Grade 9, and only a few continue through to Grade 12.</p> <p>Private schools are the other alternative to education; however, they do not guarantee better education. The private schools fall into three categories:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● <b>Low-Cost Private Day Schools:</b> These institutions share similarities with community schools in terms of affordability. Once enrolled in the private system, transferring out can become challenging and costly if affordability becomes an issue.</li> <li>● <b>Local Private Schools (Primarily Boarding):</b> These schools offer a higher education quality and charge mid-range fees. They typically attract Zambian middle-class families seeking a balanced education.</li> <li>● <b>International Private Schools (Primarily Boarding):</b> These institutions predominantly enroll students from expatriate and affluent Zambian families. They often provide a more globally oriented curriculum and educational experience.</li> </ul>

<p><b>Tertiary and University System</b></p>	<p>Several tertiary colleges are available for students interested in teacher training, nursing, public health, A-levels, and skills-based training/apprenticeship opportunities to prepare them for the workplace. Access remains inequitable, and opportunities are not widely publicized. Poor teaching quality can lead to disillusionment. Programs are also criticized for being unresponsive to the labor market.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● <b>University Duration and Challenges:</b> The university typically spans four years (subject to universities remaining open, as they are often closed due to student riots or teacher strikes). Since there are no A-levels in secondary school, the first year for many subjects is dedicated to A-level studies.</li> <li>● <b>Government-Funded Universities:</b> Zambia has nine government-funded universities that offer loans. Only three universities offer a full range of majors: the University of Zambia (UNZA), Copperbelt University (CBU), and Mulungushi University. The others are relatively small and specialize in areas such as teacher training. Private universities are rapidly increasing, but not many have international recognition. Although university enrollment has increased, employers remain skeptical of private universities. On average, it takes a student five years to secure a graduate-level job (Oketch et al., 2014) after graduating. All universities are overseen by the newly formed Ministry of Higher Education.</li> <li>● <b>UNZA, CBU, and Mulungushi demand high grades from their students to be considered for their courses.</b> To study natural sciences, students need to achieve 6-7 points in the Grade 12 exams, especially if they wish to be considered for a loan. Girls with 8 points are also considered to address the gender gap at universities.</li> <li>● <b>The government transitioned from a bursary system to a loan system.</b> The process for obtaining a loan seems similar to the old system, but the terms for repaying the loan are unclear to students.</li> <li>● <b>Private Universities:</b> There are now 53 accredited and registered private universities. There are very few opportunities for scholarships, loans, or bursaries associated with these universities. They accept students with much lower grades.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Issues with the Education System</b></p>	<p><b>Uneven Quality of Schools:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● The Southern and Eastern Africa Consortium for Monitoring Educational Quality (SACMEQ) monitors educational standards. Quality issues (SACMEQ-III, 2007) rank Zambia 13 out of 14 in Southern Africa based on reading and mathematics. According to the UNESCO Education review in 2016, adult literacy decreased from 69.1% in the period 1995-2004 to 63% in 2015. This contradicts the EFA Review, which reports higher adult literacy rates (see summary figures). Experience suggests that the UNESCO figures are more accurate. With a literacy rate of 63%, Zambia lags behind the SADC average by 10%.</li> <li>● Teacher training is a priority, especially in STEM subjects, where facilities are also very poor. Teachers' living conditions are subpar, and their salaries are low, leaving them dispirited. The average primary school teacher's salary is approximately ZMW500 per month (around US\$50), especially if they are only partially qualified. Many teachers in community schools attended school</li> </ul>

	<p>themselves only up to Grade 7. SACMEQ reported that only 14.6% of teachers in secondary schools were qualified to teach, possessing a Bachelor's degree qualification.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Most schools operate on a shift system, some with three shifts of students per day, resulting in very little student-teacher contact time. Additionally, schools generate income by offering tuition after regular classes.</li> </ul> <p><b>Poverty, Pregnancy, Poor Attendance:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Many children experience interruptions in their schooling, so it isn't unusual for people aged 20 and older to be completing Grade 12. Various reasons contribute to this, but it is most commonly due to parents facing financial difficulties and being unable to afford their children's transportation, books, or uniforms.</li> <li>• A significant number of girls become pregnant and drop out of school. While they are allowed to return, readmission rates are low. Zambia has one of the highest teenage pregnancy rates, well above the average for Sub-Saharan Africa.</li> </ul> <p><b>The Toll of AIDS:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• UNICEF (2013) estimates that 1.4 million children are orphans, with roughly 24% of 15-19-year-olds having lost at least one parent. AIDS accounts for approximately half of these orphaned children. It is challenging for orphans to stay in school unless they are sponsored by an NGO.</li> </ul> <p><b>Challenges in Universities:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Despite attracting top students in Zambia, the three government universities suffer from poor infrastructure, substandard living conditions, outdated academic resources, and underqualified and demotivated teaching staff. Students frequently stage protests due to funding issues, while teachers go on strike because they are often unpaid.</li> </ul>
<b>Academic Calendar</b>	<p><b>Gap Year Effect:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Zambian academic year runs from January to December for schools. Students do not apply to university until after they finish high school, which means they have to wait a minimum of a year before they can attend university. Due to delays in university opening, this gap became two years until the current government reduced it to one year. Despite this change, due to the competition for loans, many poorer students still wait two years before they can enroll in university, and even then, with top grades, there is no guarantee of securing a loan.</li> <li>• Private universities often admit students in January and September, but there is always a time lag before students begin university studies. This period is typically unproductive as young people struggle to find work. Pressures often intensify, especially on girls, to get married during this time.</li> </ul>
<b>SAT Test Centers</b>	<p>There are three SAT testing centers:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• American International School,</li> <li>• Pestalozzi and International School of Lusaka</li> <li>• Lechwe School in Kitw</li> </ul>
<b>ACT Test Centers</b>	<p>There is one testing center:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• American International School in Lusaka.</li> </ul>

<b>DET/IELT/TOEFL</b>	It is not necessarily needed for Zambian students as their education is offered in English for at least eight years before university application.
<b>Best time for Admissions Officers to Visit</b>	<p><b>Grade 12 Completion and Gap Year:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Students complete Grade 12 in November. Results are usually available by 1 February of the following year. Generally, students take a "gap year" (as mentioned above) since they cannot proceed directly to university from school. During this time, they typically apply to universities in Zambia and abroad. From the perspective of HALI organizations, visits between June and October would be ideal as students prepare their university applications.</li> </ul> <p><b>International Schools and Academic Year:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Many students studying at international schools in Zambia follow a Western hemisphere academic year. Visits from September to November would be ideal.</li> </ul>
<b>HALI Contacts</b>	<p><a href="#">Our Moon Education</a> Email: helen.leale-green@ourmoon.org.uk Phone: +441892522330</p> <p><a href="#">Kucetekela Foundation</a> Email: kucetekelafoundation24to27@gmail.com Phone: +260976594224</p> <p><a href="#">Pestalozzi World</a> Email: clarencemwami@pestalozziworld.com Phone: +260977859415</p>

**Sources:**

- UNESCO DATA 2023
- EFA 2015. Zambia - Education for All 2015 National Review in conjunction with Ministry of Education, Science, Vocational Training and Early Education (MESVTEE). (UNESCO)
- OKETCH, M., MCCOWAN, T. & SCHENDEL, R. 2014. The impact of tertiary education on development: a rigorous literature review. London: Department for International Development.
- SACMEQ-III 2007. Zambia - A study of the conditions of schooling and the quality of education. SACMEQ.
- UNESCO 2016. Zambia - Education Policy Review: Paving the Way for SDG4 - Education 2030. In:
- UNESCO (ed.).