# Educational Partnerships and the Provision of Education to the Masses: A Case of the Catholic Church and the Government of the Republic of Zambia from 1890 to 2025

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## ABSTRACT

This article provides the first continuous, archival-based history (1890-2025) of the Catholic Church–Government educational partnership in Zambia and shows how long-term institutional co-dependency shaped mass schooling through colonial, post-independence, and neoliberal eras (Snelson, 1974; O'Connor, 2016). Using a qualitative historical case-study method grounded in eccelessiastical and national archives, policy texts, and secondary literature, the analysis identifies three phases: a missionary-led pioneering phase that established educational infrastructure; a post-independence formalization that integrated mission schools into the national system via grant-aid arrangements; and a contemporary period defined by fiscal strain, adaptive financing, and renewed policy negotiation (Kelly, 1999; Luebke & Kanyanga, 2021). Documentary evidence demonstrates that institutional flexibility, diversified funding strategies, and sustained administrative capacity within the Church enabled the partnership to expand and sustain access despite recurring economic and policy shocks (Patrinos, Barrera-Osorio, & Guáqueta, 2009; O'Connor, 2016). The study refines Public-Private Partnership (PPP) theory by showing how path dependency and institutional adaptation operate together to produce durable public–nonstate collaborations, and it offers practical lessons for countries seeking scalable, resilient models for mass education (Adamson & Taylor, 2018).

**Keywords:** Catholic Church-State partnership; Public-private partnerships (education); Zambia (1890–2025); Mass education /access; Institutional adaptation and path dependency

## INTRODUCTION

The provision of education to large populations routinely exceeds the capacity of state institutions in many developing nations, prompting long-term collaborations between governments and non-state providers (Patrinos et al., 2009). Across sub-Saharan Africa, Christian missionary societies historically established the majority of early schools, seeding the infrastructure of modern national systems (Hastings, 1994; Sundkler & Steed, 2000). In Northern Rhodesia, Catholic missions were among the first to deliver formal schooling, combining religious instruction with literacy and vocational training long before significant colonial public provision (Snelson, 1974; Hambulo, 2016).

This article traces the 135-year partnership between the Catholic Church and the Zambian state (1890–2025) to explain how an originally missionary-driven enterprise became an enduring, integrated partner in national schooling. It addresses a gap by offering a continuous, archival-based account that spans colonial rule, post-independence nation-building, and neoliberal restructuring (Carmody, 2009). The argument foregrounds two interacting processes: historical path dependency, which shaped feasible policy choices after independence, and institutional adaptation, through which Church and state renegotiated governance, finance, and curricular boundaries across fiscal and political shocks (Adamson & Taylor, 2018; Robertson & Mundy, 2018). The article

proceeds with a literature review and conceptual framing, a transparent methodology, a chronological thematic analysis, and a discussion of comparative implications and policy lessons.

# LITERATURE REVIEW AND CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

## Missionary Origins and Path Dependency

Missionary societies established the early institutional architecture of formal schooling in much of colonial Africa, shaping teacher formation, curricular priorities, and local governance practices that persisted after independence (Berman, 1975; Hastings, 1994; Snelson, 1974). Path dependency explains why post-independence governments frequently inherited and reproduced mission-era institutional arrangements rather than building wholly new systems: early investments created durable expectations about schooling provision and administrative forms (Adamson & Taylor, 2018).

## Institutionalization and Grant-Aid Models

A common hybrid solution was the grant-aid model, where the state assumed recurrent costs - principally teacher salaries - while religious bodies retained ownership and administrative control (Kelly, 1999; Carmody, 2009). Scholarship on Zambia documents how legal instruments and budgetary routines embedded mission schools within the national system, creating formalized interdependence that shaped expansion strategies and accountability modalities (Republic of Zambia, 1966; Kelly, 1999).

## Neoliberal Retrenchment and Adaptive Financing

Economic crises and structural adjustment in the late 20th century altered these arrangements, as reduced state funding compelled mission schools to adopt fees, parish levies, and donor-driven projects (Luebke & Kanyanga, 2021; Patrinos et al., 2009). Recent work reframes mission providers as adaptive policy partners whose administrative capacities and local legitimacy remain central to service delivery under constrained fiscal regimes (O'Connor, 2016).

## Conceptual Positioning

This article synthesises the path-dependency literature with a theory of institutional adaptation. It argues that durable PPPs emerge from historical constraints that are repeatedly renegotiated. That such PPPs are repeatedly renegotiated through adaptive governance and finance practices (Robertson & Mundy, 2018; Adamson & Taylor, 2018).

# METHODOLOGY

This study employs a qualitative historical case-study design to produce a richly contextualized, process-oriented account of the long-term partnership between the Catholic Church and the Government of the Republic of Zambia (Yin, 2018). The methodological choices reflect the study's two primary aims: to trace institutional evolution across more than a century and to identify mechanism-level explanations for the partnership's durability, adaptation, and effects on educational provision (Creswell & Creswell, 2017; Denzin & Lincoln, 2017).

## Data Sources and Archival Selection

Primary documentary evidence constituted the empirical core of the investigation. The research team consulted multiple repository types to capture both Church and state perspectives: Ecclesiastical archives at the Catholic Secretariat (annual reports, Episcopal letters, school registers, correspondence); government holdings at the National Archives of Zambia (policy circulars, budget ledgers, inspection reports, and legislative texts such as the Education Act of 1966 and 2011); and contemporaneous published sources (missionary periodicals,

government gazettes, and statistical yearbooks) for triangulation and temporal anchors (O'Connor, 2016; Republic of Zambia, 1966). Secondary literature supplied historical context and interpretive frames (Hastings, 1994; Snelson, 1974).

Ecclesiastical archival selections were purposive: sites with early and continuous Catholic presence were chosen to ensure temporal depth, while variation in geography and socio-economic context (urban centres, mining districts, agricultural hinterlands, remote mission zones) provided contrast for cross-case inference within the single-case design. Governmental records were sampled to cover central policy pronouncements and district-level implementation documents to capture the vertical interplay between policy formulation and practice.

## Sampling Logic and Scope of Documents

Sampling prioritized documents directly relevant to the partnership's operational mechanics: agreements and correspondence concerning grant-aid arrangements, teacher appointment and salary transfers, school property deeds, inspection and curriculum directives, diocesan education committee minutes, and school financial ledgers. Longitudinal series (annual diocesan education reports, sequential budget records, repeated inspection returns) were sought to enable diachronic tracing of institutional change. Where archive series were incomplete, corroborating series from adjacent dioceses or central ministry records were used to reduce inferential gaps (Stone, 2012).

The study balanced breadth and depth by combining macro-level policy materials with detailed institutional records from exemplar dioceses. This mixed archival sampling allowed the analysis to move between high-level policy shifts and the granular administrative practices through which those policies were operationalized.

## Data Management, Coding, and Analytical Procedures

All consulted documents were catalogued using a consistent metadata schema recording repository, collection, file reference, document date, document type, and a brief content summary. Documents were read iteratively: an initial descriptive pass captured provenance and gist, a focused coding pass identified material relevant to pre-defined analytical categories (funding and finance; governance and administrative control; curriculum and pedagogy; access and equity; adaptive innovations), and integrative readings traced causal processes across time (Creswell & Creswell, 2017).

Coding combined deductive codes derived from the conceptual framing (path dependency; institutional adaptation; grant-aid mechanics) with inductive codes that emerged from the documents (e.g., parish fundraising mechanisms, informal teacher exchanges, localized fee-exemption practices). Coding was conducted manually and recorded in a shared digital index to preserve traceability of source–code linkages. Regular team meetings enabled intercoder comparison and the refinement of code definitions; discrepancies were resolved through iterative discussion and re-examination of primary documents to enhance consistency and reliability (Denzin & Lincoln, 2017).

To mitigate confirmatory bias, the team instituted periodic blind-coding checks in which a coder applied codes to a small set of documents without access to prior code assignments; resulting divergences were analysed, discussed, and used to refine the codebook and analytic memos. Analytical memos were written throughout to capture interpretive moves, record contradictions, and document the evidentiary basis for claims.

## Triangulation, Verification, and Adjudication Rules

Triangulation was applied as a procedural principle across all analytical phases. For empirical claims about timing, funding levels, or administrative practices, the study sought convergence across at least two independent documentary series (for example, a ministry circular corroborated by Catholic Secratariat payroll ledgers) or a primary document corroborated by a contemporaneous published source (statistical yearbook or missionary periodical) when direct archival parallels were absent (Stone, 2012; Patrinos, Barrera-Osorio, & Guáqueta, 2009).

Where documentary sources diverged, contradictions were treated analytically rather than suppressed. The study followed a hierarchical adjudication rule for quantitative assertions: contemporaneous financial ledgers and official policy texts were prioritized as primary anchors; correspondence and committee minutes were used to interpret motives and negotiation dynamics; secondary published sources served as supplementary corroboration. Divergent narratives were reported with explicit caveats and, where possible, used to generate explanatory hypotheses about institutional contestation or reporting bias.

### Process Tracing and Causal Inference

Causal inference relied on process-tracing logic to connect policy decisions to administrative practices and downstream outcomes. The study reconstructs sequences of events - policy issuance, budgetary allocation, Catholic Secretariat implementation measures, and observable institutional responses - to identify plausible mechanisms linking institutional design to observed outcomes (Yin, 2018). Mechanism claims are presented with graded confidence, linked explicitly to the strength of the documentary chain; where direct quantitative corroboration was unavailable, the analysis framed conclusions as mechanism-based explanations rather than definitive counterfactual causal claims.

### Reflexivity, Ethical Considerations, and Limitations

The research adhered to archive access protocols and anonymized sensitive personal data encountered in school registers and personnel files. Reflexively, the study recognizes that archival survival biases the record toward institutional actors and formal governance processes; Ecclesiastical files foreground managerial rationales, while government records emphasize policy intent, jointly under-representing everyday community voices and dissent (Denzin & Lincoln, 2017; O'Connor, 2016). The single-case, purposive design aims at analytic generalizability through mechanism identification rather than statistical representativeness; consequently, cross-national comparative work is recommended to test external validity (Adamson & Taylor, 2018).

Limitations include uneven archival preservation across dioceses and time periods, gaps in systematic learning-outcome data for early decades, and the interpretive risks inherent in reading institutional correspondence. These limitations were mitigated where possible through triangulation and transparent reporting of evidentiary strengths and weaknesses, and by recommending complementary methods - oral histories, community-level records, and quantitative linkage studies - for future research to recover subordinate perspectives and to assess outcome-level implications (Creswell & Creswell, 2017; Luebke & Kanyanga, 2021).

### Summary of Methodological Contribution

Methodologically, the study demonstrates how rigorous archival triangulation combined with process tracing and reflexive coding practices can yield robust mechanism-level explanations in long-range historical case studies of education policy. The protocol adopted here, systematic provenance recording, iterative coding with intercoder checks, hierarchical adjudication of conflicting sources, and transparent reporting of limitations, offers a replicable template for similar historical analyses of public–nonstate partnerships in education.

# FINDINGS

This section presents a detailed, phase-by-phase analysis of the Catholic Church–Government partnership in Zambia, organized around five analytical dimensions: financing and resource flows; governance and administrative control; curriculum and pedagogy; access, equity, and social differentials; and adaptive innovations. Each subsection summarizes documentary patterns and interprets their significance for the partnership's continuity.

### Colonial Era (1890s–1964): Pioneer and Reluctant Partner

### Financing and Resource Flows

Catholic missions initially financed schools through missionary society remittances, parish contributions, and

in-kind community support, with the colonial state only gradually providing conditional subsidies via grant-in-aid arrangements (Snelson, 1974; Hastings, 1994). These partial subsidies covered recurrent aspects intermittently, leaving capital investment and many operating costs to the Church and local communities (Snelson, 1974). The resulting hybrid finance model enabled missionaries to reach underserved areas yet created dependencies on irregular state support when grant payments were delayed or insufficient (O'Connor, 2016).

## Governance and Administrative Control

Missions held land and formal ownership of school properties and exercised day-to-day administrative control through diocesan education committees and mission-appointed headteachers (Snelson, 1974). Colonial inspection regimes increasingly interfaced with mission administration, requiring conformity to teacher qualification standards and inspection protocols while leaving local governance largely in Church hands (Hastings, 1994).

## Curriculum and Pedagogy

Mission curricula combined Christian instruction, basic literacy, and vocational training oriented toward colonial labour markets and missionary conceptions of social uplift (Berman, 1975; Hambulo, 2016). Curricular priorities advantaged English-medium competency and European moral frameworks, limiting space for indigenous knowledge and vernacular instruction in formal classroom settings (Snelson, 1974).

## Access, Equity, and Social Differentials

Mission expansion significantly increased school availability in rural localities, yet participation was stratified by gender, class, and language. Archival roll books and inspection reports point to higher attrition among girls in some districts and to barriers faced by learners whose home languages were not those privileged in mission classrooms (Hambulo & Higgs, 2019; Snelson, 1974).

## Adaptive Innovations

To sustain operations under limited state support, missions implemented local fundraising, multi-grade teaching approaches, and the use of catechists or para-teachers. Generally, such practices extended coverage and produced uneven quality across parishes (O'Connor, 2016).

## Post-Independence Era (1964–1990s): Collaboration and Institutionalization

## Financing and Resource Flows

The newly independent state formalized grant-aid arrangements and assumed responsibility for recurrent costs - especially teacher salaries - while Church bodies retained property and administrative control (Republic of Zambia, 1966; Kelly, 1999). Budgetary allocations to grant-aided schools rose markedly as enrolment expanded, signalling an explicit fiscal commitment to sustaining mission networks as part of national expansion strategies (Carmody, 2009; Ministry of Education, 1996).

## Governance and Administrative Control

A hybrid governance architecture emerged: state authority over teacher deployment, salary scales, and curricular standards coexisted with Church ownership and school-level management (Kelly, 1999). Institutionalised consultative forums and joint committees were developed to manage recurring operational issues and to coordinate implementation, embedding routinised negotiation into the partnership (O'Connor, 2016). Grant-aided schools were allowed to operate under school boards (Ministry of Education, 1996).

## Curriculum, National Identity, and Contestation

Education was mobilized for nation-building, prompting curriculum standardization that emphasized civic values and national history; mission schools were required to align with these national frameworks even as they

sought to preserve religious instruction (Kelly, 1999). Tensions surfaced when state curricular goals conflicted with Church priorities, resulting in negotiated compromises that retained religious activities within a broadly nationalized curriculum (Robertson & Mundy, 2018).

## Access, Equity, and Expansion

The combined capacity of state funding and mission infrastructure produced rapid enrolment gains and geographically broader coverage, but intra-system inequalities persisted due to variations in parish wealth, teacher quality, and local administrative capacity (Carmody, 2009). Expansion achieved scale, but uneven quality and completion outcomes remained a policy concern.

## Professionalization and Teacher Training

Mission teacher-training colleges became central to meeting demand for trained teachers and to aligning pedagogical practices with state certification requirements, reinforcing the Church's administrative significance within the national system (Snelson, 1974; Kelly, 1999).

## Contemporary Period (1990s–2025): Fiscal Strain, Resilience, and Negotiated Futures

## Financing and Resource Flows

Structural adjustment and fiscal retrenchment in the 1990s reduced state education funding, prompting some mission schools to (re)introduce fees, mobilize parish levies, and cultivate donor partnerships to cover recurrent and capital costs (Luebke & Kanyanga, 2021; Patrinos et al., 2009). Over subsequent decades, Catholic networks diversified income through NGO collaboration, targeted donor projects, and alumni funds, shaping a heterogeneous financing landscape with implications for equity across schools (O'Connor, 2016).

## Governance and Administrative Control

Church ownership and management largely persisted, but diocesan authorities increasingly carried financial risk and administrative complexity as state transfers became less predictable; joint mechanisms remained important for negotiating fee exemptions, infrastructure priorities, and donor coordination (Republic of Zambia, 1966; O'Connor, 2016).

## Curriculum, Secularization, and Identity

National curricular standardization and secularization trends narrowed the scope for confessional instruction in formal curricula while permitting negotiated religious activities outside core subjects. This balance protected provider identity in non-instructional spaces even as classroom content adhered increasingly to national standards (Robertson & Mundy, 2018; O'Connor, 2016).

## Access, Equity, and Differentiated Outcomes

Fee reintroductions and mixed financing produced access pressures, mitigated unevenly by targeted bursaries and exemption policies; inconsistencies in implementation meant that financial protections often reached only a subset of vulnerable learners, reinforcing spatial and socio-economic disparities (Luebke & Kanyanga, 2021).

## Adaptive Innovations and Programme Diversification

Dioceses developed stronger financial management, formalised bursary schemes, and partnered with NGOs to deliver infrastructure and teacher development interventions. Programmatic diversification - early childhood pilots, adult literacy, vocational training - extended the Church's educational role beyond primary provision and enhanced its policy partner profile (Patrinos et al., 2009).

**Cross-Phase Interpretation**

**Institutional Foundations and Path Dependency**

The colonial period established durable institutional scripts, property ownership, teacher formation pipelines, and administrative routines that constrained but also enabled post-independence policy choices (Adamson & Taylor, 2018). The grant-aid model is best understood as a negotiated outcome that rested on these pre-existing forms.

**Interaction of Continuity and Adaptation**

Across all phases, continuity of structure coexisted with adaptive change in finance, governance, and pedagogy. Durability derived from complementary capacities (Church administrative reach; state fiscal authority) and from routinized negotiation mechanizms that reduced transaction costs and allowed pragmatic responses to shocks (Robertson & Mundy, 2018; Patrinos et al., 2009).

**Durability and Fragility Coexisting**

The partnership's resilience in sustaining mass provision masks persistent fragility: when state fiscal capacity contracted, adaptation often preserved services but at the cost of increased local reliance on variable nonstate resources, thereby reproducing or deepening inequalities (Luebke & Kanyanga, 2021).

Keeping the aforementioned in view, it can be stated that this detailed and evidence-anchored mapping of financing, governance, curriculum, access, and innovation across time provides the empirical basis for the theoretical claims advanced in the Discussion section of the article and for the policy implications drawn in the Conclusion section of the article.

# DISCUSSION

**Conceptual Synthesis**

This case shows that two interacting processes, path dependency and institutional adaptation, best explain the partnership's long-term durability and changing form. Path dependency captures how missionary institutional scripts (school ownership, teacher-training institutions, and bookkeeping practices) constrained the range of post-independence policy options and made grant-aid arrangements a pragmatic solution for rapid expansion (Adamson & Taylor, 2018; Snelson, 1974). Institutional adaptation captures how Church and state repeatedly renegotiated finance, governance, and curricular boundaries in response to resource shocks, policy reforms, and social expectations (Robertson & Mundy, 2018; O'Connor, 2016). The theoretical contribution is that durable PPPs emerge not from static complementarities alone but from iterative negotiations within historically shaped institutional fields.

**Mechanisms of Durability and Fragility**

- Complementary capacities; The Church's administrative reach, local legitimacy, and teacher-training infrastructure complemented the state's fiscal and policy authority, enabling scale that neither actor could achieve alone (Kelly, 1999; O'Connor, 2016).
- Routinised negotiation: Joint committees, consultative forums, and formal grant-aid procedures reduced transaction costs and institutionalized dispute resolution, making recurrent coordination manageable (Carmody, 2009; Robertson & Mundy, 2018).
- Adaptive financing: Diversified revenue strategies - parish levies, targeted donor projects, alumni giving, allowed service continuity during fiscal retrenchment but created heterogeneous funding landscapes that affected equity (Luebke & Kanyanga, 2021; Patrinos et al., 2009).
- Durability and fragility coexist: institutional mechanisms preserved coverage during shocks, yet when state funding contracted, reliance on uneven nonstate resources risked reproducing disparities in infrastructure, teacher quality, and access (Luebke & Kanyanga, 2021).

## Comparative Perspectives

Comparative cases clarify boundary conditions for the Zambian mechanisms. In Kenya, a stronger colonial and post-colonial state prompted earlier centralisation pressures that constrained long-run autonomy of mission networks (Berman, 1975). Malawi's parish-based finance sustained rural enrolment in ways that parallel Zambia's parish adaptations in the 1990s, but Malawi's different legal and fiscal arrangements shaped divergent accountability dynamics (Luebke & Kanyanga, 2021). Uganda's history of episodic nationalization followed by partial reinstatement of faith-based administration produced different trade-offs between autonomy and standardization. These contrasts suggest that legal frameworks (grant-aid versus nationalization), timing of fiscal shocks, and the state's capacity to enforce standards condition whether faith-based partners retain administrative autonomy or become more tightly integrated into the state apparatus (Patrinos et al., 2009; O'Connor, 2016).

## Policy Shifts, Economic Constraints, and Secularization

Policy trajectories and macroeconomic contexts repeatedly reconfigured the partnership. The post-independence expansionist agenda institutionalized the grant-aid bargain, embedding mission networks into a nationwide schooling push (Republic of Zambia, 1966; Kelly, 1999). The fiscal crises and structural adjustment of the 1990s challenged this model, prompting fee reintroductions, parish levies, and donor dependence that altered access dynamics (Luebke & Kanyanga, 2021). More recent Free Education directives reopened negotiations over cost-sharing and fee exemptions, highlighting unresolved questions about who bears financial risk and under what conditions (Patrinos et al., 2009). Secularization and curricular standardization narrowed overtly confessional instruction in the classroom while preserving space for religious activities in non-core times; this negotiated arrangement preserved provider identity but aligned pedagogical content with national standards (Robertson & Mundy, 2018; O'Connor, 2016).

## Alternative Explanations and Boundary Conditions

Several rival accounts merit attention. One argues that mission expansion was primarily geographic - missions simply filled unserved areas - rather than institutional strength. While spatial presence matters, archival evidence of centralized teacher training colleges, diocesan accounting systems, and formal record-keeping indicates administrative capacities that extend beyond mere geography (Hambulo & Higgs, 2017). Another rival attributes outcomes to other nonstate actors (Protestant missions, private commercial schools); these actors were significant in some locales but did not replicate the same scale of teacher-formation infrastructure and sustained consultative mechanisms that characterized Catholic networks in Zambia (Snelson, 1974). Boundary conditions include legal form (grant-aid contracts that preserve autonomy versus nationalization), relative state fiscal capacity, and the timing of secularizing reforms; these conditions shape whether partnerships produce resilience with equity or resilience that masks widening disparities (Adamson & Taylor, 2018).

## Limitations and Reflexivity

Methodological constraints temper the strength of some inferences. Archival survival is uneven across dioceses and decades, privileging institutional voices and formal administrative perspectives over community-level experiences (Denzin & Lincoln, 2017). Quantitative outcome measures for earlier periods are sparse, limiting the direct linkage of financing changes to learning outcomes. The single-case design targets mechanism identification rather than statistical generalizability; comparative and mixed-methods follow-ups are necessary to test external validity (Yin, 2018; Adamson & Taylor, 2018). Reflexively, applying path-dependency and adaptation lenses foregrounds continuity and negotiated resilience; future work should explicitly seek subordinate voices through oral histories and village-level records to capture contestation and lived experience.

## Policy Implications and Research Agenda

Policy implications flow from identified mechanisms. First, formalized cost-sharing rules that delineate recurrent and capital responsibilities reduce the risk of ad hoc fee imposition during fiscal shocks (Patrinos et al., 2009). Second, investing in provider administrative capacities, teacher training, accounting, and school management

enables nonstate partners to sustain scale and quality (O'Connor, 2016). Third, embedding equity safeguards in grant-aid contracts, monitoring access by gender, language, and socio-economic status, minimizes the risk that adaptive financing exacerbates inequalities (Kelly, 1999; Hambulo & Higgs, 2019).

Research priorities include comparative testing of the mechanisms across different legal regimes and fiscal contexts, mixed-methods studies that link funding trajectories to learning outcomes, and community-level work that recovers subordinate perspectives on inclusion and pedagogy. These steps will clarify how historically rooted partnerships can be designed to combine resilience with equity in diverse Global South contexts (Adamson & Taylor, 2018; Luebke & Kanyanga, 2021).

# CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that the educational partnership between the Catholic Church and the Government of the Republic of Zambia is a historically durable, adaptive, and policy-relevant institution that has shaped the country's mass schooling trajectory from the colonial era to the present. Empirical reconstruction across three phases, colonial pioneering, post-independence institutionalization, and contemporary adaptation, shows that the partnership persisted because historical institutional forms established by missions created feasible policy options for the state and because both actors repeatedly renegotiated governance, finance, and curricular boundaries to respond to changing political and fiscal conditions.

## Theoretical Contribution

The case advances two linked theoretical claims. First, path dependency matters: missionary investments in property, teacher training, and administrative routines produced durable scripts that structured post-independence policy choices and constrained the range of feasible reforms. Second, on institutional adaptation matters, the partnership endured not through static complementarity alone but through iterative negotiations and practical innovations. diversified financing, routinised consultative mechanisms, and negotiated curricular compromises, which allowed the partnership to survive shocks while maintaining core functions. Together, these claims show that durable public–nonstate partnerships are produced by the interaction of historical constraint and ongoing adaptive practice, a dynamic that refines how PPPs in education are theorized.

## Policy Implications

Three actionable policy lessons emerge. First, formalize cost-sharing arrangements with clarity on recurrent versus capital responsibilities to reduce the prevalence of ad hoc fee impositions during fiscal downturns. Second, invest in and preserve provider administrative capacities, teacher training institutions, financial management systems, and local governance structures, because these capacities are the mechanisms through which nonstate partners deliver scale and continuity. Third, embed equity safeguards and monitoring provisions in grant-aid contracts to ensure that access gains do not entrench or reproduce gendered, linguistic, or socio-economic disparities. operationalizing these lessons requires legal clarity, predictable financing modalities, and institutionalized dialogue platforms that can mediate crises.

## Limits and Caveats

The findings are bound by methodological constraints that moderate claims about causality and generalisability. The archival record privileges institutional voices and administrative perspectives, limiting direct access to community-level experiences and everyday contestation. Systematic outcome data for early decades are sparse, so the linkage between financing arrangements and learning outcomes remains an empirical priority rather than a demonstrated causal chain in this study. The single-case design offers mechanism-level insight that invites comparative testing rather than broad, causal generalization.

## Agenda for Future Research

To strengthen policy transferability and evidence on outcomes, future work should combine comparative designs

across countries with varied legal frameworks, incorporate oral histories and household-level data to recover subordinate perspectives, and pursue longitudinal quantitative analyses that connect funding and governance patterns to learning and equity outcomes. Comparative micro-studies of Protestant and Catholic networks, and cross-national comparisons with countries that pursued nationalization rather than grant-aid models, would clarify boundary conditions for the mechanisms identified here.

## Closing Statement

The story of the Catholic Church–state partnership in Zambia is both historical and practical: it is a record of institutional inheritance and a live lesson in how public and nonstate actors can negotiate shared responsibility for mass education. When policy designs acknowledge historical legacies, invest in administrative capacity, and build explicit safeguards for equity, such partnerships can be shaped into resilient instruments for inclusive educational provision rather than sources of entrenched inequality.

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