

Full Length Research Paper

Access and quality in education in resettlement schools: The case study of Zvivingwi Secondary School in Gutu District, Masvingo Province in Zimbabwe

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In Zimbabwe, the discourse on access and quality in education has been a raging one since the colonial days of bottlenecks and outright discrimination against black Zimbabweans in education. The doors to education were declared open to all at independence in 1980 with the new Zimbabwe government's enunciated policy of education for all. It is an uncontested fact that strides were made soon after independence to address issues of quality and access in education. However, with the prosecution of the fast track land reform programme the dream for access and quality in education became a nightmare. Whilst trust schools, boarding schools, urban and some rural day schools have a comparative advantage in terms of resources like infrastructure and qualified and relatively motivated human resource, emerging resettlement schools bear the brunt of hastened and impromptu establishment. It is the contention of this paper that resettlement schools like Zvivingwi, established in the last decade, are a facade of the schools envisioned by many Zimbabweans at independence. These schools reel from abject shortage of everything except pupils. It would be recommended that government should show creativity in mobilising resources to intervene, failing which, most of the resettlement schools like Zvivingwi, risk closure as public confidence in them wanes. The researcher made use of a questionnaire and interviewed critical stakeholders at the school like headmaster, teachers, parents, pupils and education officers. School records and other critical documents were also made use of.

Key words: Access, quality, resettlement/fast-track land reform programme.

INTRODUCTION

This paper starts by examining quality and access as critical terms in educational discourse. The writer's views and those from different scholars are discussed. A brief history of Zimbabwe's education system is also given. The research, being a case study, also gives the background of the school in question as well as the research methodology. Results are discussed as findings and subsequently conclusion and recommendations are

given.

Educational access

Educational access refers to the opportunity by a potential learner to participate in education (McCoshan and Otero, 2005). Participation as defined in this paper is

not measured in terms of mere enrolment or mere presence at an educational institution but goes beyond to look at what is accessed. Educational access, should not only be evaluated by superficial means such as access to schools or technology, but should delve deeper into the nature of the knowledge being transferred by the schools attended, their overt and covert curriculum, and the technology being used. (McCoshan and Otero, 2005).

Access should be measured on the basis of skills acquisition. Where there is access to education, the degree of skills acquisition should not be in doubt even before the final examination results. It is the argument of this paper that a student who has had access to education has acquired skills necessary to enable him to function effectively in his community. The knowledge and skills acquired through participation in the education process which enable the student to gainfully engage with his/her environment for survival are the hallmarks of access. If a student attends school and fails to be equipped with relevant skills, it results in the reverse of access even though enrolment figures might suggest otherwise. It is clear therefore that the question of access is inseparably linked to quality. UNESCO (2010) argues that access to basic education lies at the heart of development and lack of educational access, and securely acquired knowledge and skills, is at the core of the definition of poverty. Sustained access to meaningful learning that has utility is critical to long term improvements in productivity, the reduction of generational cycles of poverty, demographic transition, preventive health care, and the empowerment of women and reductions in inequality (UNESCO, 2010). Access to quality education thus lies at the core of sustainable development.

Quality in education

Quality education is an outcome of, learning which strengthens the capacities of children to act progressively on their own behalf through the acquisition of relevant knowledge, useful skills and appropriate attitudes; and which creates for children, and helps them create for themselves and others, places of safety, security and healthy interaction Bernard (1999) cited by UNICEF (2000).

Educational quality is concerned with the nature of what is available to be accessed by learners. McCoshan and Otero (2005) agree that, quality education is one that satisfies basic learning needs and enriches the lives of learners and their overall experience of living.

It is evident therefore that for education to be of quality, it should have "some definite relation to the daily lives of the men and women who are seeking it" (Washington in West, 2006). Quality education should manifest itself in

the transformation of the lives of those who have attained it and their immediate community.

Quality in education is influenced by many factors like physical infrastructure of a school, motivation of teachers, management and supervision of teachers and other support staff as well as the language used as medium of instruction. Bamgbose (1991) argues that the prevalence of exoglossic language policies in Africa where foreign languages which came with colonialism are used as media of instruction despite low competence levels among indigenous Africans compromises the quality of education by making it largely inaccessible.

Quality education is education which embraces the dynamics of the changing world of work and adequately prepares learners for such challenges. If an education fails to transform the learner in terms of social, economic, moral and professional wellbeing then that education fails the quality test. Quality education, for the purposes of this paper, will also be viewed as that sort of education which allows a learner to navigate his/her way in the global village through the exploitation of advances in information communication technology. It is access to skills which matter for productivity, economic growth and social cohesion which measures quality in education. Recent assessments of learning achievement in some countries have shown that a sizeable percentage of children is acquiring only a fraction of the knowledge and skills they are expected to master. What students are meant to learn has often not been clearly defined, well-taught or accurately assessed (McCoshan and Otero, 2005).

Quality can be assessed against a number of parameters: healthy, well-nourished and motivated students; well-trained teachers and active learning techniques; adequate facilities and learning materials; a relevant curriculum that can be taught and learned in a local language and builds upon the knowledge and experience of the teachers and learners; an environment that not only encourages learning but is welcoming, gender-sensitive, healthy and safe; a clear definition and accurate assessment of learning outcomes, including knowledge, skills, attitudes and values; participatory governance and management; and respect for and engagement with local communities and cultures (McCoshan and Otero, 2005).

One critical element of quality education is its regard and development of correct emotional attitudes in learners. Such an education promotes the peaceful co-existence of citizens on the basis of mutual respect and tolerance. An education system or a learning environment which engenders feelings of inferiority or excessive pride lacks in quality. UNESCO (2010) argues that human rights education is an essential element of quality education. Quality education aims not only at forming trained professional workers, but also contributes to the development of individuals who possess the skills to act and interact in a just society. Human rights education allows people to participate in their communities and society in a constructive and respectful way for

themselves and others. It aims to deliver outcomes such as personal and social growth, the respectful conduct of citizens toward each other and the provision of opportunities for learners to develop critical thinking and life skills (UNESCO, 2010).

Information Communication Technology (ICT) has brought a revolution to the African continent and quality education is now assessed on the basis of an individual's access to technologically-driven skills. The absence of technology in an education system today results in an inadequate and perhaps non-transformative education. In short, quality in education should be measured by the education's "fitness for purpose" (Kariwo, 2007).

Resettlement/ fast-track land reform programme in Zimbabwe

For the purposes of this paper, resettlement refers to those areas which emerged after the often violent and compulsory takeovers of white owned farms by the government of Zimbabwe to resettle landless indigenous Zimbabweans which started in the year 2000 which is also known as Fast Track Land Reform Programme. In most cases, these new farms were not prepared for a large influx of inhabitants and, as a result, had no basic facilities like health and education.

Brief history of Zimbabwe's education system

Having defined educational access and quality and having spelt out what resettlement refers to, it is critical to give a brief outline of the nature of Zimbabwe's education system from the colonial days up to now. At independence, Zimbabwe inherited a stratified and highly segregated system of education which served the interests of the white minority. Zvobgo (1996) notes that, Zimbabwe inherited from Rhodesia a racially structured system of education in which two parallel systems existed. The European system was designed to serve and promote white interests and ensure white domination and superiority over blacks while African education was really an education designed to perpetuate the subjugation of the blacks by the whites.

Kanyongo (2005) notes that prior to 1980, very few black children had access to education and this privileged but few African children "found themselves in schools that were poorly funded, with very few educational resources and a separate curriculum from that offered in all-white schools". Kanyongo (2005) further states that the colonial government made education for white students compulsory and therefore offered universal education and spent as much as twenty times more per white student than the black student.

Zvobgo (1996) also notes that there was disproportionate emphasis laid by the colonial government on the development of European education while before 1918, African education remained solely in the hands of

missionaries. By the time Zimbabwe attained independence, successive leaders of the colonial government had come up with changes which still fell far short of the equality mark. Three distinct strata of schools had emerged by the 1970s: the Group A schools which were state schools zoned in white-only areas and which had adequate support from government and, as a result, adequately prepared white children for academic and professional future. Africans had the Group B schools which were zoned in high density residential suburbs for blacks. These had inferior facilities and the qualifications of teachers were lower than those for the Group A schools. Whilst Group A students would sit for Associated Examining Board (AEB) examinations at the end of 4 or 5 years, African children sat for a Rhodesia Nation School certificate of Education (RNSCE) or could go to another inferior category, the F2 schools which catered for those who would have failed academic subjects (Kanyongo, 2005). European education catered for 100% of white children and yet African education catered for just about 50% of students leaving the other 50% as dropouts that provided a ready reservoir of labour for the colonial government. The third group of schools during the colonial period was Group C which comprised of Mission schools, private schools and rural day schools. In comparative terms, the funding these schools received from the government was insignificant against what the Group A schools got.

At independence, the new Zimbabwean government working on its ideology of equality which was steeped in the ideology of socialism sought to 'destratify' and promote equality in the education system. Zvobgo (1996: 61) observes that "drastic changes" were introduced in the schools with the first one being the deracialisation of all schools. There was massive injection of financial resources into the education system especially in relation to rural areas which had been neglected by the colonial regime.

A uniform examination system was introduced though it was run by the University of Cambridge. As of now, Secondary education comprises a four-year Ordinary level cycle where the official entry age is 13 years, and a two-year Advanced level cycle. The Ordinary level cycle covers a wide curriculum and different schools offer different subjects depending on the availability of resources. However, there are core subjects that students are required to take. These subjects are: Mathematics, English, Science, Shona or Ndebele, Geography, and History. Officially, a student should take a minimum of eight subjects in secondary education. At the end of the four-year cycle, students sit for the Zimbabwe General Certificate of Education Ordinary level (ZGCE-O) examinations. A student should pass a minimum of five subjects, which include Mathematics, English and Science. After Ordinary level, a student may choose to proceed to Advanced level or go to any of the following: teacher's training college, technical college, agricultural college, polytechnic, and nursing training college.

The government also embarked on a gradual localisation process for school examinations. The Zimbabwe School Examinations Council (ZIMSEC) was established through an Act of Parliament in 1994 as a body responsible for assessment in primary and secondary education in Zimbabwe (Abraham 2003). ZIMSEC then took over activities from the Examinations Branch in Zimbabwe and the University of Cambridge Local Examinations Syndicate (UCLES) of the United Kingdom. Ordinary level was localised in 1996. The localization of examinations was completed in 2002 when ZIMSEC finally took over the control of Advanced level examinations (Musarurwa and Chimhenga, 2011).

Expansion in terms of education provision during the first years of independence was phenomenal. The unprecedented expansion of the education sector could not be sustained by the government after about ten years of independence. Because the government had policies which were driven by the ideology of socialism, most programmes were “welfarist” in nature and soon the economy indicated signs of distress (Muzondidya in Raftopoulos and Mlambo, 2009: 169). By 1990, the government was under pressure to adopt foreign remedies to realign and arrest the economic downturn. It had to implement the International Monetary Fund (IMF) prescribed Economic Structural Adjustment Programme (ESAP). Challenges of access and quality which had been apparently addressed in the first decade of independence resurfaced. Chung (2006) argues that it was after ESAP that street children emerged in urban centres as parents who had lost jobs could not afford school fees. With the economic meltdown of the turn of the new millennium in Zimbabwe, provision of education suffered even more. Schools were impromptly established in the volatile resettlement areas and these had a myriad of challenges of material and human capital provision.

School background

The research was carried out at Zvivingwi Secondary School, a core education day school in Gutu District of Masvingo Province in Zimbabwe. The school was started in the year 2001, initially by war veterans and land hungry peasants who had moved on to a farm which previously belonged to a white farmer. At inception, the school had 180 pupils. Initially, due to the thirst for education, these had no teaching qualifications but had done Ordinary level. The government then came in the second half of 2001 and staffed the school with qualified staff.

RESEARCH DESIGN

The research is largely qualitative in nature and makes use of the case study. There is however to a limited extent the use of quantitative approaches in the form of the semi-structured ques-

tionnaire used for teachers to get information on their length of service qualifications among others and the minimum use of some statistical data like percentage pass rate for the school which would be examined qualitatively for their meaning in relation to education provision at Zvivingwi. Triangulation was employed to analyse the problem. Interviews were carried out on parents, education officers and the school head. There was document analysis where school records were examined and a focused group discussion involving the 5 Ordinary level pupils at the school was held. There was also observation of the school's infrastructure.

FINDINGS

From the research instruments used, the research established that the school has a staff compliment of 4 which is made of one female and three male teachers. Though these are qualified teachers in terms of their qualifications, currently they are forced by the situation to teach in areas they did not train in. This is one of the reasons behind the poor pass rates in all the subjects on offer. Of the 4 teachers, each one teaches 2 subjects from form one up to form four which amounts to a lot of work in terms of scheming and planning.

The school has a total of 30 pupils with 16 girls and 14 boys. Girls outnumber boys marginally mainly because unlike boys they do not want to walk long distances to rural schools which are located at least 10 kilometres from Zvivingwi. There is evidence of physical access which does not translate to access to quality education.

The school has no proper classrooms. At the moment, the former farm house which is vandalised and dilapidated, with broken doors and window panes, accommodates the Form 4 class in its lounge and the bedrooms serve as accommodation for the 4 teachers. The school has no laboratory or any other specialist room. Though the school offers Agriculture, there is no infra-structure to suggest that any meaningful practical work is taking place. Pupils focus mainly on theory in the Agriculture lessons.

The farm house is supplied with electricity but there is no educational gadget like computers which makes use of the power except for lighting and cooking by teachers. There is no water supply at the school and the teachers fetch water downstream about a kilometre away. Teachers endure a 2 hour walk from the school to main road which leads to the nearby Growth Point for services like health and shopping. For these teachers, being at this school is almost unbearable and they would all leave when an opportunity arises. The morale is very low and this affects the way they execute their duties.

Forms 1-3 are accommodated in a disused tobacco barn which has no electricity supply, but precariously cracking walls, some blown off zinc sheets, and have gaping holes on its sides which served as fire points when tobacco was cured. The floors are not floored and they are out rightly dusty. These 3 classes have no doors and like the form 4 class have no learning materials like maps and charts on display. Save for poorly improvised

chalkboards, there is nothing to suggest that these could be used as classrooms at secondary school. The self esteem of pupils is seriously affected and they feel those who attend better schools like boarding schools are better than them in everything else. Worse still, the pupils think that their situation can never be corrected and they live in perpetual despair.

The curriculum comprises English, Maths, and Science, Religious studies, History, Shona, Geography and Agriculture. All the pupils from form one do all the subjects on offer. The school has witnessed drastic reduction in enrolment with pupils transferring to different schools but mainly to well-established rural schools and other council day schools established in the early years of Zimbabwe's independence. In 2011 there were no registered candidates for Ordinary level as the 6 candidates who were there dropped out. Three girls got married and the 3 boys decided to leave and look for manual work because learning to them appeared to be a waste of time. This could have been so because in the Ordinary level class of 2010 only one candidate passed 5 subjects but did not pass Mathematics.

The research established that the school has witnessed reduced enrolment from around 180 pupils in 2001 to 30 this year. In terms of results, from 2004 to 2010, the percentage pass rate has been between 0% and 10%. Though text books and exercise books were supplied by United Nations Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF), there is not much variety as UNICEF simply donated one title per subject. There is no library or a computer room because the books and computers are not there. Some pupils, just like their parents, admitted that they have not seen a computer in their lives. The teachers are computer illiterate and seem content not to have any computer literacy skills.

As for co-curricular activities, the school finds itself unable to make up complete teams in various disciplines. Of the 16 boys who have ages ranging from 13 years to 20 years, only about 10 are interested in soccer which makes it difficult to come up with a team which would compete with other schools. The previous district competitions saw the school which plays without requisite sports attire being the whipping boys/girls after losing all the matches. Worse still, parents see sport as a waste of time. It can be observed that there is a limited selection of sporting disciplines to select from and unfortunately the teachers are not qualified in coaching any discipline.

The teachers feel the parents need to reorganise themselves to chart the way forward because at the moment there is bickering about who has or does not have control at the school. Because of the political orientation of parents, there is resistance to any form of aid which might come from individuals or non-governmental organisations. Some Non-Governmental organisations have neglected/shunned resettlement areas because of their perception of the political situation in the country. They perceive these newly resettled

farmers as Zimbabwe African National Union (Patriotic Front) (ZANU-PF) functionaries who should not be assisted. Parents have also been overstepping their mandate and went to the extent of causing the forced transfer of some local teachers who were very effective but had suspicious political alignment in the eyes of the community leaders. Those teachers present now are not sure if they are guaranteed freedom of expression and association and they are rather reserved. There is a culture of silence. As a result of the mistaken sense of personal ownership of the school by some parents, the previous school development committee allegedly misappropriated school funds with impunity because of the members' influential political positions. This has affected the zeal of parents to pay fees for their children and to offer their labour where required. Any request for payments in cash or kind is now met with resistance.

The school seems not to be a favourite for most parents and pupils prefer to walk distances of about 10 kilometres to better schools and some even find lodgings in villages near council rural day schools for their children to be able to attend school.

The parents have also failed to embrace the issue of staff motivation incentives and because of their isolated life from the wider society, do not realise that these incentives are meant to enhance educational quality. The negative perceptions about teachers being opposition Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) supporters which were rampant among ruling party supporters around the year 2000 still run deep amongst some parents who are ZANU (PF) supporters. These parents feel teachers are greedy, too mercenary and do not produce good results, oblivious of the fact that good results come from motivated staff.

The Ministry of Education, Sport and Culture also seems not to be doing enough. The school was last visited two years ago and education officers cite lack of money and vehicles as the major stumbling blocks to their supervision itineraries. One can however discern the sense of frustration in the officers who seem not to have authority to determine the course of events at the school. The restive years from 2000 to 2009 in Zimbabwe saw even education officers forced out of office by political activists and these activists are mostly in the farms.

Conclusion

The paper looked at access and quality in education at Zvivingwi secondary school. While the school enrolls pupils in the hope of giving them useful skills for survival, it seems the situation on the ground suggests that education provision at Zvivingwi does not go beyond enrolment. In terms of skills acquisition, the school falls far short in its inability to establish a diverse curriculum which has many practical subjects like Woodwork, Metalwork and Home Economics. Worse still, the

absence of computer technology at this school excludes pupils from being active participants in the global village. The academic subjects on offer like Religious Studies and Shona have proven to be abjectly ineffective in addressing the demands of practical reality. Most worrying of all is that school attendance in Zimbabwe has been measured in terms of passes one has at Ordinary level and unfortunately, with no passes recorded, the majority of graduates at Zvivingwi have nothing to show for their years at school. In fact, there is very little to talk about in terms of quality education at Zvivingwi and the education seems not to hold any key to community development.

RECOMMENDATIONS

There is no doubt that Zvivingwi is facing dire constraints which make its intended objective of providing education difficult. For the purpose of correcting the situation at Zvivingwi and making sure that education offered addresses development needs of the community, this research recommends the following:

- 1) The Ministry of Education, Sport and Culture
- 2) Should deploy to Zvivingwi teachers who would teach in areas they specialised in to ensure quality delivery in educational instruction.
- 3) There is need for the education officers under whose armpit Zvivingwi falls to ensure that the scarce resources allocated for supervision are used for schools like Zvivingwi. The school needs handholding if the standards are to be improved. This will see an increase in visits and ensure that set targets are realised.
- 4) Government through the Ministry of Education, sport and Culture officials should together with political leaders like councillors and Member of Parliament, in whose area Zvivingwi falls meet the parents and create an awareness in them which separates education from politics. Most school projects fail to kick off mainly because political leaders have made themselves *de facto* authorisation entities. Depoliticising school issues would enable the marketing of this school to potential donors who can assist with critical resources.
- 5) One other creative recommendation is to make sure that Zvivingwi is twined with a viable secondary school where teachers, pupils and parents can engage in exchange programmes. This would broaden the horizons of teachers, pupils and parents. This can enable pupils at Zvivingwi to access gadgets like computers.
- 6) The government officials in the Ministry of Education, Sport and Culture should encourage teachers at Zvivingwi to be resourceful and to move with the times by ensuring that they use the internet for their researches to keep track with changing trends in education. This can be done through the establishment of a well equipped

resource centre within the reach of resettlement schools like Zvivingwi. Teachers should then be granted free access to carry out their research work.

7) It is the duty of government, through its relevant structures to make sure teachers at Zvivingwi do not resign to fate and get absorbed by the community they work in; instead, teachers should link the school with the outside world through a display of appetite for new information and zeal to staff develop themselves. Whilst purchasing a computer can be expensive for teachers, their personal cellular phones could, at a very low cost, be connected to the internet and provide valuable information for personal and professional growth.

8) Government should institute programmes for in-service of teachers for the teachers to keep abreast with current trends in education. Staff development courses, for example, in Information Communication Technology (ICT) would ensure that teachers keep up with the fast changing world.

9) Being in a resettlement area, the school could be availed land for it to carry out agricultural activities with parents providing the labour. Crop farming, piggery and poultry rearing can be the panacea to the perennial shortages of financial resources at the school. Such activities will raise money into the school coffers, including perhaps, money for school educational projects and for staff motivation incentives, as well as inculcating an entrepreneurial spirit in pupils. Such kind of creativity might see a tremendous improvement the quality of education which would make access to education for the pupils a reality. This kind of an approach is also advocated by renown educational philosophers like Dewey who believed that children should go to school “to do things and live in a community which give them real, guided experiences which foster their capacity to contribute to society” (Dewey, 1916) .

ABBREVIATIONS

AEB, Associated Examining Board; **ICT**, Information Communication Technology; **MDC**, Movement for Democratic Change; **UNESCO**, United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organisation; **UNICEF**, United Nations Children’s Emergency Fund; **RNSCE**, Rhodesia Nation School certificate of Education; **UCLES**, University of Cambridge Local Examinations Syndicate; **ZANU (PF)**, Zimbabwe African National Union (Patriotic Front); **ZGCE-O**, Zimbabwe General Certificate of Education Ordinary Level; **ZIMSEC**, Zimbabwe School Examinations Council.

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