

Full Length Research Paper

Composite classes: The Murezi school experience

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The research looks at the phenomenon of composite classes as experienced by the Murezi community. To gather the required data and to have an in-depth understanding of the Murezi school experience, the case study was employed and the questionnaire, interview and on-site observations were employed as data gathering instruments. The three were used in order to complement each other to achieve triangulation. The study notes that there are constraints in the implementation of such classes which are almost always in underprivileged environments. Teachers in such schools are overwhelmed with work and often 'short-circuit' their teaching to achieve pleasing academic paper results. The extramural activities which help in achieving a holistic school product are largely sacrificed because of want of time and resources, be they material or human. The researchers feel that the schools affected need to get first priority in computerization and other programs aimed at making teaching and learning pleasurable not laborious.

Key words: Composite classes, resources, educational attainment.

INTRODUCTION

Brief historical background to education provision before and after independence in Zimbabwe

Pre-and-post-independence Zimbabwe gives classic examples of how ideology overrides all other considerations as the following quotation shows:

“The history of education in Southern Rhodesia is quite simple, in the sense that the evolution of the education system was determined by the interests of the dominant minority rather than any other considerations.

The education system evolved strictly as an integral part of minority settler society and for the manifest purpose of both serving and consolidating that society (United Nations, 1980: 181).”

The aforementioned was done through discrimination on the provision of education as the following quotation which is about Rhodesian education in 1975 shows:

The government ... spends nine times more on each European child than it does on each African child in the primary grades. Because of this expenditure a European

child had a 'right' to education which is compulsory to the age of 15. He automatically goes to secondary school and if he is bright enough is carried on to the sixth form where tuition is free. On the other hand the African child enters a system that is ... highly selective. Whether he continues or not at certain levels depends upon his ability to pass examinations and his parents' ability to pay his fees ... (Murphree (Editor) 1975: 53-54).

The aforementioned scenario reflects a situation where education/curriculum is used to maintain the oppressive status quo which benefits a few. An Education Ordinance was passed in 1969 in Zimbabwe which lay down that half the time spent in “native” schools should be devoted to rudimentary industrial training, which was considered to be the only education besides religion that would make the African “useful”. This was meant to make the African contribute unquestioningly towards the economic enrichment of the whites as their (blacks') riches would be in heaven.

It was official government policy that 50% of primary school pupils would enter secondary school and of these 12.5% would enter senior secondary school and 37.5% would go to junior school the F1 and F2 schools respectively. It was *bourgeoisification* for the 12.5% and

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proletarianization for the majority 37.5% and primary school drop outs. This shows that education was playing a very supportive role towards the upkeep of the capitalist mode of production. In fact the then Secretary for Education defended this state of affairs vehemently thus:

The 12.5 and 35.5% are all right. The other 50%, the lower half of the pool of ability, these will be the unskilled workers of the future... They take their proper place in society, be it rural, industrialized or ranching... just plain economics and the age-old relationship of capital and labor (Rose (Editor), 1973: 245).

The Kerr Commission of 1953 maintained that the purpose of African education "hinges on the formation of 'good character' which meant loyalty to the state and its constitution and the commonwealth" (Moyana, 1989: 48).

Literature, History and Geography among others were very Western: "It did not matter whether (African) students knew what it was all about. It was British and therefore good for them!" (Moyana, 1989: 51). In high school students sat for an external British examination. The Cambridge Syndicate prepares the syllabus and set and marked the examinations and the University College was a college of the London University system. This obsession on things British calculated to instill into the African child ideas of British heroism, valor and superiority and in a way justified colonialism as an enlightening experience for Dark Africa. The aforementioned examples, which are not unique to Zimbabwe, serve to show that colonial education was specially calculated to mentally enslave the African in order to make him/her deny himself/herself in order for the colonizer to easily control them. The aforementioned are classic examples of how the powerful impose their own ideas or beliefs on the powerless. Schooling was:

"to produce a sufficiently docile, "colonized" population to prevent the emergence of an outright political challenge to the status quo ... Schools negated the common sense knowledge of the colonized by reinforced the self-image of incompetence and ignorance for those who did not go to school or those who failed at school. This often led those who were schooled to despise their own culture and traditions in favor of those of the colonizer ... the colonial element in schooling is attempt to silence, to negate the history of the indigence, to rationalize the irrational and fain acceptance for structure which are oppressive (Kallaway, 1984: 8-9)."

As Kierkegaard rightly argued, "life can only be understood backwards but lived forwards", then it is important to briefly discuss the philosophy that influenced education during the colonial era and at independence so that in mapping out the way forward, we can have something to reflect on since the ideology of the day has

a great impact on the curriculum (hence education system) (Zvobgo, 1997), it is really appropriate to briefly discuss the ideological journey that has influenced our education system before venturing on the way forward. During the colonial era the ideology in Zimbabwe was capitalistic and it had a great impact on the education system and the curriculum which also became capitalistic in nature as it served the interests of the ruling class. The curriculum was designed in such a way that the position of the whites was not in any way threatened by the blacks. It is therefore easy to see that the content, organization and even aims of the colonial curricula were structured along classical humanism lines. There was differential and restricted access to the curricula with the elite (men of Gold in classical humanistic terms) having access to certain forms of knowledge which were denied by the majority of blacks (men of silver and bronze). There were subjects and schools that were a preserve for the whites the blacks had to content with F2 schools. The poorly equipped schools in terms of manpower and infrastructure such as those running composite classes were meant to produce the hewers of wood and drawers of water for the bosses who were getting their 'suitable education' at sufficiently provided for schools.

The aforementioned scenario changed in 1980 when the country got political independence and the ideology changed to scientific socialism. The new government sought to provide education for all as a pre-requisite to development and to make it more relevant to the needs of the country. As a result there was a gradual movement towards the localization of examinations leading to the formation of the Zimbabwe Schools Examination Council. These agents were implemented in order to create an egalitarian society. As a result of this new thinking the first budget of independent Zimbabwe saw education as the biggest single item on the expenditure list with a budget of more than 200 million dollars, an increase of 285% from the previous one and most of this was to be spent on previously neglected rural areas (Statistics from Zimbabwe The First Decade 1980 to 1990: 15).

However, the government has changed the ideology (the most influential determinant of the curriculum) to capitalism and this will have profound influence on the curriculum.

Zimbabwe being a member of the SADC and UN is faced with a lot of challenges in as far as defining its educational philosophy is concerned. Zimbabwe's aims of education, in the Education Act (1996: 207-208) amended include the following that:

Every child has a right to education; no child in Zimbabwe shall be refused admission to any school on the grounds of race, tribe, color, creed, place of origin, political opinion or social status of parents, and primary education compulsory for every child of school going age.

After Zimbabwe got independence in 1980 the Lancaster House Constitution which it adopted dictated that there was to be 'a willing seller and willing buyer policy' on land acquisition. This seems to have controlled land acquisition up to 1990. In the early 2000s, having been frustrated by the slow process of the land issue resolution, some Zimbabweans started to 'invade' formerly white occupied land. This has had an impact on educational provision since the people who occupy new areas do so without prior construction of facilities. The make shift schools, which are often in the form of former farm houses or workshops or barns are normally manned by a few teachers who often cater for more than one class hence the establishment of 'composite' classes. These are a result of a low pupil population due to the low numbers per unit area because of the relief brought about by land reform. Instead of composite classes becoming a thing of the past, they are more and more such institutions because of the desperation encountered by migrating parents and their children. As said elsewhere in this article, in Third World countries composite classes are associated with poverty, grossly under-resourced schools, pole and daga and grass thatched schools. Perhaps the only significant property they share with their counterparts in high income countries is that they normally serve low population communities which cannot raise full classes of learners.

School background

The school was established in 1963 about four kilometers from its current site. It was established to service black farmers' children after their parents, who had been identified and offered farms moved from the 'reserves' to the farms they had bought. The school was relocated in 1969 to the present central site after more farmers came into the area. The then government assisted the farmers in the building of the school which is about 40 km from Chivhu town and approximately 18 km off the Chivhu-Gutu tarred road in an area called Lancashire. The school did not have composite classes until year 2000 according to the current head. This period coincides with the 'fast-track' land reform undertaken in Zimbabwe which led to migration from the area. These former Native (African) Purchase Areas, though not densely populated, are not from the country's prime farming land hence the exodus to former 'European' land leaving schools in the former areas literally semi-deserted hence the need to combine classes.

The school is part of the Nyamatsani zone that also includes Mudonzvo, Chikwidibire, Mutemachani and Nyazvidzi Primary Schools.

CONCEPTUAL FRAME WORK

Composite classes can be defined as classes which

'teach more than one grade level in the same classroom' <http://www.theage.com.au/articles/2003/11/14/1068674374150.html> (Date Downloaded: 12/01/2010). There are classes in which children of different ages and stages made up usually pupils from two consecutive stages are taught within the same classroom usually because there are insufficient numbers of children to form separate age-related classes.

Composite classes that are also referred to variously as multi-age, multilevel, fluid or vertical groups are an interesting and controversial phenomenon all over the world where they are run. This is because parents often think that their child is being disadvantaged in some way by being in one. Parents of older children's main fears are that brighter students will be forgotten and will lose interest in learning. They also feel "composite class" is code for teaching to the lowest common denominator. Parents of younger children, on the other hand, fear that their child will be overlooked and suffer academically or socially (http://www.schoolparents.canberra.net.au/composite_classes.htm (Date downloaded: 12/01/10).

Composite classes are not a preserve of either developed countries since such countries as Australia and New Zealand also have them. The classes, especially in developing countries, give the pupils the rare opportunity to go to school as encapsulated in Millennium Goal 2 of the United Nations which is to 'achieve universal primary education' (UNESCO, 2005: 10). This should be looked at as the very basic educational need. What is more important is to retain the children in school -a feat in Third World countries: 'once children are enrolled, it is important that they stay in school *and receive an education that prepares them for life*' (emphasis added) (UNESCO, 2005: 12). This is the essence of this endeavor, that is ,to see if the quality of instruction in underprivileged schools as represented by Murezi, prepares the children concerned and to what extent it makes them compete on an equal footing with the rest of the graduates across the country.

Advantages and disadvantages of composite classes

Well-planned and well-catered for composite classes can provide significant benefits to both the younger and older students in the class. Older students can benefit from helping younger students in co-operative learning situations and in so doing revise whatever they will be assisting the junior learners with. The younger students have the opportunity of enhanced learning experiences where they are ready for it.

Advantages of composite classes for teachers and students

a) Teaching in a composite class compels teachers to

think of children as individuals.

- b) The techniques of group teaching and of individual instruction can be applied in composite classes.
- c) Pupils at different stages of learning can help each other with their work.
- d) Composite classes can be arranged by resourceful teachers so that they are a means for catering for the special needs of gifted children as well as slower ones.
- e) Gives an opportunity for revision and consolidation of concepts for higher grade pupils.
- f) Lower grade pupils are academically 'stretched' and therefore forced to perform better. If a plant is put in a thicket of larger ones it is forced to compete for light and food even with these established ones and this toughens it. This may apply to pupils but the counter argument is that the plant may grow tall but not strong.

Some disadvantages of composite class contexts

- a) They frustrate gifted higher grade learners who may not need the revision.
- b) Frustration of lower grade pupils who may not measure up to the experienced pupils from higher grades.
- c) The surprise element in lessons is extinguished -work taught is not new to pupils from higher grades.
- d) Not enough attention is given to individual differences within a grade-the tendency is to look at the global picture-the teacher is worried more about whether or not he/she has catered for the e.g. Grade 3, 4 and 5 not individuals within the grades.
- e) Composite class teaching requires a teacher who is committed and motivated-a teacher who is prepared to go the extra mile. There is no guarantee that all grades in Zimbabwe's schools are manned by such cadres.

Teaching in Zimbabwe

The teacher exodus and the adverts for teachers flighted frequently and a difficulty by teachers' colleges and Education Departments at universities to attract full quota trainees reflects a waning profession. Newspapers are awash with advertisements on lecturers and teachers. For example in one paper *The Sunday News* of 16 November 2007, Mtshabezi High School advertised for 13 permanent and 1 temporary teaching post, Embakwe High School, 8 'O'-level and 4 'A'-level posts and Manama High School, 7 posts. Munda High School advertised for 7 posts (The Chronicle, 15 December 2007) and Gwanda High School 10 (6 permanent and 4 temporary) (The Chronicle, 22 December 2007). For example in one paper *The Sunday News* of 16 November 2007, Mtshabezi High School advertised for 13 permanent and 1 temporary teaching post, Embakwe High School, 8 'O'-level and 4 'A'-level posts and Manama High School, 7 posts. Munda High School

advertised for 7 posts (The Chronicle, 15 December 2007) and Gwanda High School 10 (6 permanent and 4 temporary) (The Chronicle, 22 December 2007). In the space of two days J. Z. Moyo Government High School had vacancies for 8 permanent and 4 relief teachers (*The Chronicle*, 7 January, 2008) while Cyrene High School had vacancies for 4 A-level teachers (The Chronicle, 8 January, 2008). The exodus does not only affect schools. For instance, The United College of Education had 21 vacant lecturing posts as advertised in *The Sunday News* of 28 October 2007 and Hillside Teachers' College advertised for 24 posts (The Chronicle, 10 January, 2008). Of interest is that five were in professional studies, 3 in English and 3 in Music, just to mention a few. These figures are more or less the numbers obtaining in most colleges as the 'normal' subject establishments. This shows that some subject areas were grounded or almost grounded when they advertised a situation that is not unique to the college cited. Teachers' colleges have an average establishment of about 60. If one college advertises for about a third of its establishment then there is a huge problem of motivation. The 2011 official Poverty Datum Line in Zimbabwe was on average US\$500.00 yet teachers in particular were earning on average US\$250. Expecting such lowly paid personnel to go beyond their call is unfortunate.

Composite classes in Zimbabwe

In Zimbabwe composite classes are mainly found in areas which are sparsely populated where only a few children go to school. Such areas include commercial farming areas and the resettlement areas. The latter have significantly increased in the advent of independence in 1980 and recently through 'fast-track' land distribution hence the need by the researchers to look at the inevitable result of such population movements: the composite class.

The head of the school under study revealed that such schools are often termed non-viable schools and are not provided with the full establishment of teachers. For instance any school that has an enrolment of less than 120 is given at most three teachers. Schools which run composite classes in Zimbabwe are the seriously underprivileged ones often of pole and dagga, situated in remote areas where not many qualified teachers want to work and in infrastructurally challenged environments.

Key research questions

- 1) How do composite classes operate?
- 2) How are they organized?
- 3) How prepared are the teachers in handling these classes?
- 4) What are the constraints?
- 5) What is the performance of pupils in composite classes

Table 1. School enrolment in the past 5 years.

2004	2005	2006	2007	2008
115	90	95	87	90

vis a vis those in conventional classes?

RESEARCH DESIGN: QUALITATIVE RESEARCH

To gather the required data and to have an in-depth understanding of the Murezi School experience the case study was employed. Qualitative research procedures, in particular the case study, were mainly used to collect and analyze the required data.

In a case study the investigator attempts to examine an individual or unit in depth. The investigator tries to discover all the variables that are important in the history or development of the subject... (Ary et al., 1990: 451).

This chosen research design, like any other belonging to the qualitative paradigm, is concerned primarily with the process rather than the product; looks at meaning, that is, how people interpret their own experiences; views the researcher as the main data-gathering instrument in the field and is descriptive as well as inductive (Merriam, 1988; Creswell, 1994; Glesne and Peshkin, 1992). Case studies aim to arrive at a comprehensive understanding of the group or unit under study by among other things describing the subject's history and environment by gathering data about the subject's present state, past experiences, environment and how these factors relate to one another (Ary et al., 1990). Since it is very much dependent on the researcher(s) as the main data-gathering instrument(s) the two researchers had to carry out on-site observations, interview all the main actors in the composite class environment: representatives of the teachers, pupils and parents the aim being to 'study real-world situations as they unfold naturally...' (Bogdan and Biklen, 1982: 28). When information is finally gathered, the qualitative paradigm demands a detailed descriptive account of what was observed before inductive conclusions are made. The goal of qualitative research is "to portray the complex pattern of what is being studied in sufficient depth of detail so that one who has not experienced it can understand it" [emphasis added] (Ary et al., 1990: 445). As much detail as possible will be supplied. The main data gathering techniques were interviews, observation and open-ended questionnaires.

Interviews

The following were interviewed the school head, the two teachers, three current pupils and one ex-pupil who is a product of the composite class system and one pioneer of the school and a farmer in the area where the school is.

We believe the wide spectrum of interviewees involved gives a fair reflection of the attitudes and an opinion of the Murezi School community in as far as the composite class concept is concerned.

Questionnaire

To augment the interview questionnaires were used one specifically for the school administration and the other for the teachers. The questionnaires consisted of open-ended questions most of which required the respondent to elaborate/give reasons. Focus here was on how language, the main carrier of culture, attitudes, feelings, beliefs etc was used. The writers view whatever the respondents

produced, be it speeches, or written work as transcripts of the minds of the respondents. Also of interest to the researchers was how the information gathered from the interviews and questionnaires would not just corroborate but also complement each other to paint a full picture especially bearing in mind that no one instrument can be said to be flawless. It does not require a homo sapien endowed with extraterrestrial mental faculties to come to the conclusion that the use of more than one data-gathering instrument is better than one. The Shona have a saying: '*Rume rimwe harikombi churu*' (loosely translated: one huge man cannot encircle an anthill) which stresses the importance of co-operation. The same co-operative aspect is required in the use of data gathering instruments to achieve triangulation.

Observation

As researchers we tried, and we believe successfully, to capture the minutest of details of the proceedings of our interaction with the human and non-human environment we came across, details which will be vividly painted in words and a sprinkling of figures in accordance with the research's naturalistic slant. This is in line with what Patton espouses thus:

The data from observation consists of detailed description of peoples' activities, actions and the full range of interpersonal interactions and organizational processes that are part of observable human experience... (cited in Best and Kahn, 1993: 84).

FINDINGS

School enrolment in the past five years

School enrolment in the past five years has been very low. This means that the school has been in the 'non-viable' category during this period which entitles it to only three teachers (Table 1).

2009 school enrolment

School enrolment has more or less stabilized in the last five years reflecting that the population has remained stationary. The stabilization of enrolment however does not have any impact on the teacher establishment. The population of the girls is worrisome as it is almost two thirds of that of the boys. This may reflect on some disturbing demographic phenomenon since at national level the female population is 52% of the total population a fact not reflected in the data gathered. Girls may be forced to drop out of school to take up such chores as domestic work at the expense of their schoolwork (Table 2).

Pupils' performance

Grade 7 results in the past 5 years

At Grade 7 the grades per subject range from 1 to 9 with grade 1 being the best while 9 is the worst. Grade 6 is the cut off point for a pass in a subject and any pupil who

Table 2. 2009 School enrolment.

Grade	Girls	Boys	Total
1	10	12	22
2	2	10	12
3	5	9	14
4	6	8	14
5	4	4	8
6	6	6	12
7	3	5	8
Totals	36	54	90

would have scored any grade higher than 6 in a subject is considered to have failed (Table 3).

Best Grade 7 pupil's performance

The Grade 7 performance is quite impressive. In 2008 there was a crippling strike that virtually paralyzed the public sector for almost the entirety of the year. This may explain the very low pass rate in 2008. However if all the 13 subjects were examined the school would not fare this well: results seem to be impressive because the other nine subjects are sacrificed for the success of the four examinable ones; we contend (Table 4).

DISCUSSION

The research looked at the phenomenon of composite classes as experienced by the Murezi Community. This concept is not new to Zimbabwe-one of the researchers once learnt under a composite class environment thirty years ago. At that school a Grade 5 class was combined with a Grade 2 one. Each grade faced its own board under the same roof and activities were dialectically separate. In fact the combination was meant to give the teacher one 'challenging' class (Grade 5) and 'less demanding' grade twos. Co-learning was out of the question since the two classes were grades apart. What was feasible was co-habitation but partaking of separate curriculum diets. The Murezi experience is slightly different since the teachers seem to deliberately combine grades which have some aspects in common: Grades 1 and 2, infant grades providing the foundation; Grades 3, 4 and 5, as the middle grades with grade 4 building onto work and Grade 6 and 7 as the finishing grades with Grade 7 being the consolidating or the icing one). The teachers said that in most cases they plan work that is common but 'extend' the work to cater for the other grades. In the case of the Grade 3-4-5 cluster, the basic work would be Grade 3 work after which more challenging work for the other grades would be introduced while the initially taught grade would be doing

written work. The teachers indicated that they concentrated on the core subjects that are examined because they hardly have time to go beyond that. For instance lessons at primary school level are normally 30 min long and teaching goes on up to 13.00 h. If teaching and learning start at 08.00, and there is the normal 30-min break then there are only four and half hours of teaching at most nine thirty minute lessons. In the case of the Grade 3-4-5 cluster this translates to three lessons per day because to teach one subject continuously to three grades one needs one and a half hours.

After lunch the three teachers have to attend to other duties: the head has to attend to administrative issues while the other teachers have to man the extra-curricular activities and sports. Term 1 normally has athletics-for the teachers this involves coaching different categories of pupils in track and field events. Categories include female and male and different age groups.

Term 2 focus is on ball games: the barest minimum is soccer, netball and volley ball and these disciplines have two teams each: one for the juniors and the other for the seniors and these need skilled manpower.

Cultural activities constitute the main extramural focus of Term 3 mainly the choir, traditional dance and drama. The aforementioned is the barest minimum done by a conventional primary school in Zimbabwe. It is clear from the above scenario that the three teachers cannot adequately and effectively provide for the all-round educational needs of the pupils.

The young, newly qualified teacher taking Grade 3, 4 and 5 indicated that the little experience he had was that of his one year Attachment teaching practice. During that stint he had not come across this type of class (composite) and even at college, nothing had been done to prepare him for something like that. For him, it was a shocking and frightening experience. He felt overloaded with work when it came to scheming and actual teaching. Marking was not a problem for him because the numbers were manageable. He admitted that for some subjects like Shona and 'Content' he just taught the three grades together and gave the same work to all the grades. This tallied with what H, a pupil said during an interview that for some subjects the teacher taught them together and gave them the same work. This she said the teacher did when he was tired. On how she knew the teacher was tired she said that the teacher would tell them he was tired and that is why he grouped them together.

The aforementioned scenario might only work for the fast learners in the lower grades (if challenging concepts work covered in Grade 3 and 5 adding onto Grade 4 are taught) and slow learners in the upper grades (if simple concepts are covered to cater for the lower grades). The situation is an unhealthy one as planning and scheming should take into cognizance the learners' ages and stages of development. Some may end up switching off completely while others may just get confused which is detrimental to the children's learning.

Table 3. Grade 7 results in the past 5 years.

2004	2005	2006	2007	2008
86%	100%	95%	100%	50%

Table 4. Best grade 7 pupil's performance*.

Year	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008
Units of the best Grade 7 pupil	6	5	6	5	16

The head takes Grades 6 and 7 which look like a good arrangement when one considers his vast teaching experience. However a deeper analysis shows that the arrangement is very unhealthy considering that he is up and about with administrative duties which require him to travel to the District Offices regularly. During his absence, the two teachers who are already overloaded can only 'baby sit' his classes. One wonders if real help is rendered to the learners in such circumstances-it is bad enough to be in an ill-equipped composite class but it is something else to have a teacher who has to dart in and out of the classroom when other roles scream for attention.

Conclusion

The research looked at the phenomenon of composite classes as experienced by the Murezi Community. This concept is not new to Zimbabwe-one of the researchers once learnt under a composite class environment thirty years ago. To gather the required data and to have an in-depth understanding of the Murezi School experience the case study was employed and the questionnaire, interview and on-site observations were employed as data gathering instruments. The three were used in order to complement each other to achieve triangulation. The study notes that there are constraints in the implementation of such classes which are almost always in underprivileged environments. Teachers in such schools are overwhelmed with work and often 'short-circuit' their teaching to achieve pleasing paper results. The extracurricular activities which help in achieving a holistic school product are largely sacrificed because of want of time and resources be they material or human as well as rock bottom motivation. The researchers feel that the schools affected need to get first priority in computerization and other programs aimed at making teaching and learning pleasurable not laborious.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1) There is need for an increase in teacher establishment

at the so-called 'non-viable' schools by employing teacher assistants/temporary teachers.

2) Have non-resident teachers/peripatetic teachers especially in such demanding but often neglected areas such as Music, Physical Education and Sport so that learners get quality instruction. This would also lessen the burden of the regular teacher who would then be expected to perform better.

3) Persuade parents to chip in and pay for extra teachers (teachers over and above the stipulated establishment). As an agricultural community they could contribute in kind (their produce) which could then be sold and help fund school projects including paying the salaries of the extra personnel.

4) Some pupils may benefit from their interaction with higher grade material and learners as revealed by the teachers. These should be allowed to skip grades. There is no point in keeping a pupil who would have shown that he/she is capable of tackling higher grade concepts. Forcing such pupils to stay stuck in their current grades, fact (and ironically) with the granting of teacher incentives as is prevailing at the school, smacks of pedagogical insensitivity.

5) The seven-year period for primary school education in Zimbabwe may be extravagant. The same skills/abilities/concepts could be taught in much shorter a time. This argument has been necessitated by the fact that in spite of its impoverished learning environment and despite scrambling for the one teacher by the two or more grades, the school's performance during national examinations is like any average Zimbabwean school.

6) Education officers should visit especially the special schools more often. In fact it was established that no education officers had visited the school since 1994. Heads of schools are key result area rated by education officers or district education officers but these have never set foot at the school during the headship of the incumbent head which started five years ago. How authentic are such appraisals by armchair appraisers. Regional education officers expect heads to board public transport to get to town to conduct business but do not themselves lead by example by boarding the said transport to assess schools especially those in distress and assist them accordingly.

7) First priority should be given to the special schools, the officials call 'non-viable', in terms of computerization so that the overburdened teachers could use non-human apparatus to effectively deliver. Computers enable the teacher to prepare appropriate work less laboriously and ask the relevant pupils to do the work whilst the teacher attends to other classes. Expecting one teacher to manually prepare work for three grades in 13 subjects is not asking too much-it is ridiculous. The same three teachers are expected to attend to extra-mural activities: Athletics, soccer, netball, and volleyball, The Choir, Traditional Dance etc. The head, for instance, has to attend to the administrative duties in addition to teaching two classes and at times walk the 18 km to get to the Chivhu-Gutu road to board a bus to travel to the District Education Offices. These teachers, it should be borne in mind, receive the same salary like any other counterparts at well-to-do schools, not a dime extra. In by government where parents incentivize teachers according to their capabilities, teachers at these other schools receive much more.

8) Teachers teaching under extremely trying situations such as those at Murezi should get extra payment. When teaching two classes that teacher will be performing the duties of two teachers and this should be acknowledged and remunerated accordingly. If this is not done the affected teachers will simply short-circuit the teaching, 'pleasing results' from the schooling obtained but without meaningful education attained.

9) Non-viable' schools could benefit from pre-planned lessons for example by CDU so that the teacher focuses on the teaching. Some may argue that this move stifles teacher creativity. The teachers may be encouraged not to dogmatically follow the pre-planned lessons. This may prove to be a better devil than the current state of affairs-what creativity can come out of one teacher preparing for 39 subjects or 13 subjects per class (of three)?

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