

QUALITY OF EDUCATIONAL PROVISION IN FAST TRACK RESETTLEMENT SCHOOLS IN ZIMBABWE: A CASE STUDY OF CHIWODZA PRIMARY SCHOOL

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Abstract

This study sought to establish the quality of educational provision in primary schools in newly resettled farms in Zimbabwe through the Fast Track land reform programme that commenced in 2000. The schools, meant to service children of the newly resettled farmers, were hastily set up without much planning, thereby raising concerns on the quality of educational provision. The research adopted a case study design in which Chiwodza School was selected as a single case for deep probing. Data were collected using ethnographic techniques such as observation, document analysis and interviews with staff at the school.

An analysis and interpretation of data established that there was a plethora of problems that affected the teaching and learning process in schools in newly resettled farms in Zimbabwe, thereby affecting negatively the quality of educational provision. Prominent among these problems were poor infrastructure, shortage of instructional materials, inadequate support from the Responsible Authority and School Development Committees, lack of staff development for teachers and school heads, and a general negative attitude of parents towards assisting the schools. The study recommends, inter-alia, urgent government subvention in the provision of classrooms, teachers' accommodation and ablutions, while parents and the responsible authority, on the other hand, should assist with the provision of instructional materials.

Keywords: Educational quality,curriculum,

Introduction

At independence in 1980, Zimbabwe adopted the policy of quantitative expansion of the education system in order to increase access to education to the majority of the people, particularly the African population that had been disadvantaged due to racial policies of the colonial era. Consequently, Zimbabwe has experienced an unprecedented expansion of the education system in the past two and half decades of independence, with the last five years being mainly focused on increasing educational provision to 'new farmers' resettled in former Large Scale Commercial Farms (LSCF) under the 'Third Chimurenga' also known as 'Fast Track' agrarian reform. The hastily instituted Third Chimurenga/Fast Track land resettlement created a problem of what to do with the education of children of the new farmers, thus, provision of schools in the newly resettled farms had also to be 'fast-tracked'.

In a few lucky cases, the new farmers were settled on LSCFs that had existing schools but, in the majority of cases, schools were non-existent altogether. It should be noted that historically, African workers in LSCFs were underserved in terms of access to education because white commercial farmers did not regard it as their obligation to build schools for African workers on their farms (Sithole, 1999). Even in the few cases where schools were already in existence, there were some deep-rooted traditional problems affecting the quality of

education. For instance, the majority of such schools established by white commercial farmers during the colonial era were manned by untrained temporary teachers and headmasters, operating under acute shortages of textbooks and other teaching resources. They also suffered from poor management and supervision of the learning environment since most headmasters were not qualified for the job (Chikomba, et al 1999). Therefore, the new farmers who were settled in such historically disadvantaged areas were confronted with an education system with inherent problems of quality.

In the majority of cases where the new farmers were settled in LSCFs that had no schools at all, they, together with the government, faced the urgent task of providing schooling facilities for children. The government had to fast-track the establishment of schools because it was politically inexpedient not to accommodate the demands for education for the new farmers' children. The Sunday Mail newspaper of 13 June 2004 reports that to meet this challenge, tobacco barns and farm workers' houses and, in some cases, pig-sties were converted into classrooms. Where no such infrastructure existed, new farmers erected pole and dagga, grass-thatched classrooms such as in the case of Chijaka School in Makonde District (The Sunday Mail, 16 January, 2005).

While access to education was somewhat assured through such measures, it would appear that the first casualty of this development was the quality of education. Coming from a background of being poor peasants, the new farmers could not afford to provide school facilities such as good quality classrooms and instructional resources (Nhundu, 1999). Because of this constraint, the new schools often failed to meet the Ministry of Education registration requirements. As Nhundu (1999) postulates, for the reason above, the majority of Fast Track schools remain unregistered and, therefore, do not qualify for government subvention. This, inevitably, has infrastructure and resource mobilisation implications for the schools.

Media reports about the conditions of learning in schools in the newly resettled farms portray a sad scenario. For example, The Standard newspaper of 28 November, 2004 reports:

....a visit to most primary schools in the Third Chimurenga resettlement areas reveals cracked walks, sagging rafters and unglazed windows. Parents have watched helplessly as their children cram into former tobacco barns, where lessons are conducted under stifling conditions.

The Herald of 12 January 2005 also reports that teachers shunned being deployed in schools in newly resettled farms. They cited lack of basic infrastructure and resources like teacher's houses, viable transport, piped water and electricity as the major reasons why they resented deployment in such schools. Within the same perview, the Gweru Times newspaper of 7 January 2005 quotes the Midlands Deputy Provincial Education Director (DPED) responsible for quality assurance lamenting that Grade Seven results in the province showed that the quality of pupil achievement had generally declined since the onset of the Third Chimurenga agrarian reform. He is further quoted as having pointed out that the worst performance was by schools established in new farming areas set up under the Third Chimurenga agrarian reform. Pupils' academic achievement is one of the main indicators of the quality of education (Fuller, 1986), although it is itself a by-product of several other processes and factors, which also warrant consideration.

All this comes against a background where the Zimbabwean government, through the Ministry of Education, Sport and Culture (MOESC), has since shifted its attention from quantitative expansion to focus more on qualitative improvement of educational provision (MOESC, 2004). Policy planners now place greater emphasis on quality of education indicators such as equitable distribution of trained teachers and headmasters, availability of textbooks and other instructional resources and the management of the learning environment (Chikomba et al, 1999). Therefore, the challenges regarding educational quality in Zimbabwe

is, paradoxically, resultant from the system's own success in expansion and increase of access to education by the under-served groups.

It is on the basis of the fore-going observations that the researchers were prompted to make a contribution to the on-going educational discourse about issues pertaining to quality of educational provision through an in depth study of Chiwodza Primary School. The school was established in January 2002 on Central Estates, a ranch formerly owned by LONRHO Zimbabwe, but now settled by new farmers under the government's Third Cimurenga/Fast Track agrarian reform.

Main Text

Literature Review

As pointed out earlier, the issue of quality of education is currently a major curriculum issue of concern in Zimbabwe as it is elsewhere the world over. The theme of educational quality should be understood within the context of educational reform which Zimbabwe has been pursuing since attainment of independence in 1980. This view is energized by Kapfunde (1999) who points out that at independence, the Zimbabwean government adopted an educational reform policy geared to increase access to education, enhance curricular relevance and improve the quality of education. Hawes (1979) concurs that in the field of curriculum studies the issue of quality of education should be considered within the framework of quantity-quality dichotomy. This quantity-quality dichotomy features prominently in the post independence educational reform policies in sub-Saharan African countries, Zimbabwe included (Kapfunde: 1999; Nhundu: 1999). A post independence expansion of the education system in Zimbabwe when human, financial and material resources were in short supply led to a rapid deterioration of quality as indicated by shortage of classrooms, qualified teachers, textbooks and other instructional materials (MOESC: 1993).

Although the term quality education is widely used on the Zimbabwean educational landscape, this concept is little understood and also hard to define. Fuller (1986) points out that the definition of the term 'quality of education' is almost elusive. In Zimbabwe the term 'quality of education' is loosely used to refer to academic achievement of pupils. Schools with high pass rates are regarded as high quality schools (Mahere, 2004). Thus, in general, there has been a strong leaning towards output approaches in determining the quality of educational provision. This approach has some limitations because it is silent on the learning conditions, supervision and management of the learning process. Further, learner characteristics are not considered yet they are important inputs that determine academic achievement. The above features are important benchmarks that determine the quality of education. However, as Fuller (1986) argues, a school that emphasises on academic excellence alone and ignores the physical, moral and cultural outcomes is a low quality school.

The above description of the quality of education provides a key aspect of the theoretical framework for this study. As noted earlier, in most cases the term has parochially been applied by considering pupils' pass rates only. Yet a holistic definition would adopt what Romiszowski (1984) calls a systems approach that considers the inputs, processes and outputs of the education system. From an epistemological point of view, quality of education is a function of inputs and efficient management of those inputs to produce a worthwhile product (Fuller, 1986). In this case, the term 'quality of education' would be defined in the context of the availability of education resources and their management to produce an academically excellent student who is well groomed culturally, physically and morally.

This study intended to shift from the parochial paradigm that focuses on academic excellence only, to adopt a broader perspective that considers a holistic analysis of the learning environment in schools. Informing this paradigm are the studies of Fuller (1986), Munuane (in Ross and Mahlck 1990) and Hughes and Coombe (1986). Munuane (in Ross and

Mahlck 1990) points out that every society has certain explicit and implicit measures or status indicators that determine the quality of education. In Munuane's (1990) view, status indicators of the quality of education are a combination of educational inputs, processes and outputs. In consonant with this view is Fuller (1986) who contends that the quality of education is characterized by school inputs, management practices and student performances.

Educational inputs feature among the most important internal indicators of quality. According to Munuane (in Ross and Mahlck, 1990), educational inputs include financial, physical and manpower measures associated with resources that are provided for students at each educational level. Within this framework, financial measures can be understood in terms of educational expenditure per student. Heyneman (in Ross and Mahlck, 1990) postulates that schools with good quality of education are epitomized by huge financial expenditures per student. On the other hand, schools with poor quality of education are characterized by low expenditures per student as exemplified by rural and farming community schools in developing countries like Zimbabwe. Kapfunde (1999) concurs with this viewpoint, pointing out that the growing financial squeeze experienced by many developing countries led to unpalatable policy choices like spreading available resources thinly and by cutting expenditures on textbooks, library facilities and deferring repairs and maintenance of physical structures such as classrooms.

The benchmarks for quality education discussed earlier and problems threatening the provision of quality education cited above form the basis for evaluating the quality of educational provision in Fast Track schools as represented by Chiwodza Primary School in the current study.

Statement of the problem

The study stems from the observation that during the Fast Track land reform exercise embarked upon by the Zimbabwean government in 2000, schools were hastily set up to cater for children of the newly resettled farmers. The majority of such schools were set up in makeshift structures in former white commercial farms without much planning, thereby raising concerns regarding the quality of educational provision in such schools. The study, therefore, sought to investigate and determine the quality of educational provision in the Fast Track schools, using Chiwodza Primary School as a case study cite.

Research Questions

What is the nature and state of the physical infrastructure at Chiwodza School?

What is the level of teachers' academic and professional qualifications?

What is the nature and state of educational facilities and resources?

What is the nature of the management and supervision of teaching and learning at Chiwodza School?

Justification of the study

Research and evaluation are of immense practical value to the curriculum theory building process, which, in turn, informs practice in schools. It is within this purview that the researchers viewed the relevance and significance of this study which sought to evaluate the quality of educational provision at an identified Fast Track school in Zimbabwe. It is hoped that this study provides information which may contribute to the improvement of the quality of education in the Zimbabwean education system in general, and the emerging schools established as a result of the Fast Track agrarian reform in particular.

Significance of the study

The study attempted to establish the nature and quality of educational provision at a selected Fast Track school in Zimbabwe. It is hoped that the findings of this study will be beneficial to frontline participants in curriculum implementation who include teachers, school administrators, and pupils at Chiwodza School and other schools in the same situation. This is so because the study explored experiences, problems and challenges in such schools and insights obtained through the study may be useful in attempts to improve the quality of education.

The research findings may also assist policy makers in their decision-making process. It is the researchers' cherished hope that the findings of this study will be of practical value to the quality assurance department at the provincial offices in the MOESC.

It is also hoped that the findings of this study may, in a special way, add value to the ever-expanding body of knowledge in the field of curriculum implementation, change and innovation. Lastly, it is hoped that the findings of this study may act as an impetus to academics and other curriculum theorists to conduct detailed research on the subject covering a wider sample of such schools.

Delimitation of the study

As a Case study, this research focused on Chiwodza Primary School in Gweru District in the Midlands Province of Zimbabwe. Focusing on a single case allowed the researchers more time to make an in-depth probe and analyze thoroughly the nature and quality of education at the chosen school. Deep probing of Chiwodza Primary School, it was hoped, would provide some insights which could be useful to other schools in the same category (Wolcott in Chisaka, 2000). The participants in this study included the headmaster and six teachers at the school. The DPED in charge of quality assurance in the Midlands Province was also part of the participants since he was in a better position to provide a broader perspective of the quality of education in primary schools in newly resettled farms.

Limitations of the study

The main limitation to this study was that it was based on a single case. Like any other case study, its findings may, therefore, not necessarily apply to other schools in a similar situation and this posed a threat to the external validity of the findings.

Research design

This research adopted the case study method of investigation, which lends itself more to the qualitative research paradigm. Choice of this design is supported by Cohen and Manion (1989) who expound that educational phenomena, by their very nature, lend themselves to emphasis on the interpretive and subjective analysis as opposed to the objective positivistic approach, and hence are best explored by case study methods. In further support of this approach, Wiersma in Chikwa (2004) contends that, a case study enables the researcher to obtain detailed information, which would be analyzed, patterns extracted and comparisons made within a limited time scale.

Though the study focused on the quality of education in primary schools in newly resettled farms in general, Chiwodza School was delineated for deep probing because the researcher felt that the conditions of learning at Chiwodza were supposedly representative of the quality of education in other schools in the same situation. Borg and Gall (1996) support this view positing that, an in-depth observation and analysis of a single case can provide insights into many other similar cases.

This study adopted what Mavhunga (1998) quoting Borg and Gall (1989) calls the "situational analysis" case study in which the points of view of all participants were surveyed.

In this case the viewpoints of teachers, the Teacher-in-Charge (TIC) and the Headmaster were elicited through interviews. Further, the views of the Deputy Provincial Education Director (DPED) responsible for quality assurance in the Midlands province under whose jurisdiction the school fell were also sought. It was the researcher's hope that the views of all the major participants would lead to a deeper understanding of the quality of education at Chiwodza School, and other primary schools in the same position.

To consolidate the "situation analysis" case study approach, observational methods were also used in which the researcher undertook class observation. In line with advice from Borg and Gall (1996) and Robson (1993) observation in this qualitative research involved taking field notes as the study proceeded, thus, allowing the researcher to use triangulation of various methods of data collection. This was necessary in order to achieve internal validity of the results as noted by McMillan and Schumacher (1993).

The other method of data collection employed in this case was analysis of documents such as class registers, record books, inventories, and lesson observation reports. For the purpose of this study, these documents were 'interrogated' to provide insights about the quality of education at Chiwodza School. It was hoped that information about availability of instructional materials, management and supervision competence of the Headmaster and the Teacher-in Charge and job competencies of the teachers would be revealed by these documents.

The participants

This study chose Chiwodza School as the source of information. Data were collected from the Headmaster, the T.I.C and the four teachers at the school. Because of the small numbers involved, the whole population was considered for data collection. The researcher also found it imperative to solicit information from the Deputy Provincial Education Director (DPED) responsible for quality assurance in the province where the study site is located, since his department is pivotal in the maintenance of quality education in the schools at provincial level.

Data collection methods and instruments

Basically, three ethnographic techniques were used to collect data in this study, namely interviews, document analysis and observation. These were triangulated in order to increase the validity of the results. This is in line with the viewpoints of Cohen and Manion (1989) that if two or more different methods are used and yield basically the same results, then the validity of those results is assured. The researchers, therefore, assumed that the use of multiple techniques of data collection provided a better portrayal of the Chiwodza situation.

Interviews

For the purpose of this study, four sets of respondents were interviewed namely the school head, the six teachers, the TIC and the Deputy Provincial Education Director responsible for quality assurance. Therefore, four sets of interview guides were prepared in line with Robson (1993), who contends that in focused interviews, the researcher uses interview guides, specifying key issues.

All the interview guides had two types of items namely fixed alternative and open-ended items. The fixed alternative items allow the respondent to choose from two or more alternatives. Kerlinger in Cohen and Manion (1989) supports the use of fixed alternative items, outlining that they have the advantage of achieving greater uniformity of measurement and therefore greater reliability. Mavhunga (1998) also points out that fixed alternative items have the added advantage that they make respondents answer in a manner fitting the response category and responses are more easily coded.

Being aware of the limitations of the fixed alternative items, that is, they tend to be restrictive on the respondents; the researcher also included open-ended questions in the interview guides. According to Borg and Gall (1996), open-ended questions have the advantage that they offer participants a wider scope of flexibility. Macmillan and Schumacher (1993) assert that, open-ended questions allow the researcher to follow up on any revealing leads, which would be given by the interviewee. In the same perspective, Mavhunga (1998) posits that, further probing may help clear misunderstandings that may arise, and also, in testing the limits of the respondents' knowledge of the subject under discussion. Finally, as Borg and Gall (1996) point out, open-ended items allow the researcher to learn first hand about the social world. For example, in the Chiwodza case open-ended question allowed the researcher to learn first hand about the nature of the learning environment. It is on the basis of the strength of the above observations that open-ended items were included in the interview guides.

Document analysis

Borg and Gall (1996) define document analysis as a researcher technique for objective and systematic study of documents and records. In the Chiwodza case documents such as staff meetings minutes, inventories, class registers, plan and scheme books, lesson observation reports and pupils' exercise books were analyzed. Macmillan and Schumacher (1993) support the use of document analysis asserting that documents are useful for correlating or augmenting evidence from other sources like interviews or questionnaires. Therefore, the above listed documents were interrogated since they were likely to provide useful information about the availability of educational resources and the quality of supervision and management of the teaching-learning situation. This is in line with Hawes and Coombe's (1986) proposition that availability of educational resources and the supervision of the curriculum implementation process are important indicators of the quality of education. A checklist was prepared to guide data collection through document analysis.

Observation

In addition to the above instruments of data collection, this study also employed the observation method. According to Borg and Gal (1996) the advantage of observation methods is that, if used accurately, it avoids the inaccuracy and bias of self-report data of the interview. Robison (1993) opines that, the observational technique might be used to validate or corroborate data obtained from interviews. Robson (1993) further postulates that, the observation method is pre- eminently the most appropriate technique for getting 'real life' in the 'real world'.

In the same purview, Sechrest in Borg and Gall (1996) contents that, social attitudes like prejudice are best studied thru observation in the natural real life situation. Therefore, observational methods can yield more accurate results. For the purpose of the study, the researcher used as checklist and observation guides focusing on availability of instructional inputs and lesson observations to determine the quality of the teaching learning process at Chiwodza School.

Data presentation, analysis and discussion

Data presented, analyzed and discussed in this section was collected to answer four research questions outlined earlier in this study. Therefore, data collected through interviews, observation and document analysis was dealt with question by question.

The first research question sought to determine and examine the nature of the learning environment in terms of infrastructure at Chiwodza School and its effects on educational

quality. To answer this question, data was gathered through interviews with the Headmaster and observation of the nature of the infrastructure at Chiwodza School. Interviews with the Headmaster and the observation method revealed that:-

There was not Staffroom and this affected the smooth implementation of the curriculum because the staffroom is an important place where teachers plan their work, mark pupils' books, discuss their professional issues and the discipline of students.

The Headmaster' Office was also too small and overcrowded.

There were only two pit latrines which were almost full. This posed a health hazard to both teachers and students.

The makeshift class rooms were too small and poorly ventilated.

The above scenario points a negative picture on the quality of education at Chiwodza School.

The second research question sought to find out the level of teachers' academic and professional qualifications and how they affected the quality of education at Chiwodza School. Data pertaining to teachers' qualifications and experience was obtained through interviews and this was triangulated by analysis of official documents such as teachers' files. All the six teachers at Chiwodza were found to be properly qualified to implement the Curriculum at Primary School level. They all had passed Ordinary Level and possessed a Diploma in Education. Thus, all the teachers were suitably qualified to implement the Curriculum. Further, the Headmaster was also suitably qualified to effectively supervise the Curriculum implementation process.

The third research question sought to determine the availability and adequacy of resources like instructional materials such as textbook, chalkboards, chalks, exercise books and syllabuses. Data answering this question was collected through a document analysis checklist. This data was triangulated with data obtained through interviews and observation. The researcher found out that, there were only 25 benches and 17 pupils' desks reserved for Grades 4 to 7. Grades 1 to 3 squatted on the floor. The critical shortage of furniture, coupled with the overcrowding in the small classrooms made the management of the learning-teaching environment a nightmare and this had a negative bearing on the quality of education at Chiwodza School.

The fourth and final research question sought to examine the nature of the supervision of the learning environment and its impact on the quality of education at all. Data answering this question was gathered through an interview with the School Head, and further triangulated with the data obtained through observation and document analysis. The Head possessed an Ordinary Level Academic Certificate and a Certificate in Education with fourteen years experience. His qualifications met the minimum requirements needed to ensure quality education at a primary school. Further, he was fairly experienced to know the teaching and learning terrain well. Studies by Fuller (1986) show that the Headmaster's academic and professional qualifications determine his effectiveness as a Supervisor of the teaching-learning environment. However, the critical shortage of the teaching-learning resources made supervision of curriculum implementation difficult, thus threatening the quality of education at Chiwodza School.

Conclusion

On the whole, the findings proved that educational quality at Chiwodza was poor. The quality of teaching and learning was negatively affected by numerous problems as highlighted above. Although qualified and relatively experienced teachers and Headmaster staffed the school, their effectiveness was thwarted by the critical shortage of educational resources. Though the findings were based on a single case study, they were looped to be a mirror reflecting the situation in other primary schools in newly resettled farms.

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Note: The text should be in English, Times New Roman, font 12

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