A Comparative Analysis of Performance of Satellite Primary Schools and their Mother Schools in Masvingo Province, Zimbabwe

Hlupo, Takesure and Tsikira, Joseph

Department of Educational Foundations, Great Zimbabwe University, Masvingo, Zimbabwe.
Department of Early Childhood Development, Masvingo Teachers’ College, Masvingo, Zimbabwe.

Corresponding Author: Hlupo, Takesure

Abstract
The research sought to compare performance of Grade seven pupils at six satellites schools with that of six mother schools. The researchers used a survey in which questionnaires were administered to a sample of eighty respondents which comprised of six Heads of mother schools, six Teachers-in-Charge (TICs) of the satellite schools, thirty four teachers at mother schools and the other thirty four teachers at the satellite schools. Interviews were also extended to the school Heads, TICs and to one school development committee representative from each of the satellite schools. The researchers used a t-test to determine if there was any significant difference in performance between the satellite schools and their respective mother schools. Indeed, a marked difference was found to exist owing to a host of variables ranging from teachers’ morale, location of the satellite school, lack of standardised infrastructure and the general attitude of parents. It is recommended that the State gives immediate attention to addressing the disparities. Furthermore, it must demonstrate unequivocally that it is determined to prioritise education at satellite schools by providing meaningful per-capita grants, working hand in glove with donors and re-introducing rural allowance to boost morale of teachers at satellite schools. Hot sitting has to be eradicated through adopting prefabricated buildings which are affordable. There is need to establish viable early childhood centres manned by competent professional teachers so as to build a strong foundation for the learners to abridge the performance gap between mother schools and satellite schools.

Keywords: satellite school, mother schools, teachers, performance gap, Mwenezi district,

INTRODUCTION
Zimbabwe’s education sector suffered greatly during the years of economic crisis with declining budgets and large scale brain drain due to loss of personnel into the diaspora. Coupled with that, it was at that time that the government embarked on a massive land reform programme which witnessed the mushrooming of satellite schools as a stop-gap measure to provide affordable education to the newly resettled farmers. In light of this development, one wonders if the satellite schools have moved in the right direction in terms of bridging the gap between them and the well-established mother schools. This article seeks to establish if there is any significant difference in performance between learners at Grade seven level at satellite schools and their mother schools, and if so, establish the possible ways of mitigating the problem to ensure that children in satellite schools effectively benefit from the school system.

Upon gaining independence, Zimbabwe inherited a two tier education system negatively skewed in terms of equality of educational provision between the whites and blacks. The new government sought to transform educational provision by making it a universal good (Chimhowu, Manjengwa and Feresu, 2010). The concept of equality of education became a catchy phrase at almost all fora, thus making primary education free for all. Chimhowu et al (2010) thus state that, by the late 1980s, Zimbabwe had achieved primary education for all by sixty-five percent. Indeed, that achievement was remarkable, given the fact that, by 1980, only a third of Zimbabwe’s children had access to primary education. Thus, it can be further harnessed that there were quantitative and qualitative improvements as black primary children who previously received a markedly inferior quality of education to their European counterparts were accorded equal opportunities and quality education. Massive investments led to massive gains in literacy and by 1990 literacy rates for the 15-24 year age group had risen to 98%, (Kiernan, 2008 in Chimhowu, et al, 2010). On that score, Zimbabwe’s education system has been regarded as one of the best in Africa. No wonder why it attracted learners from neighbouring nations such as Zambia, Malawi and South Africa (Zhangazha, 2011).
According to a Zimbabwe Teachers Association (ZIMTA) representative on Zimbabwean Television (ZTV) (30/09/2009), education used to claim 22% of the national budget. However, this rosy picture pointed above has plummeted to about 12-13%, as the government budget priority shifted from education and health to political survival. For example, the disbursement of an unbudgeted gratuity to war veterans in 1997 had serious economic implications that brought a paradigm shift to the education sector. When the land reform programme sprang into life in 2000, that worsened the already underfunded and under-resourced education sector at all levels. The plight was further exacerbated by the economic collapse up to 2008. The severe lack of financing reversed the successes once witnessed. There was a marked decline in school improvement grants and the once prestigious status attached to the teaching profession was eroded. There was rampant brain drain as a huge proportion of teachers vied for greener pastures in the diaspora. Consequently, there was an acute shortage of teachers, teaching and learning materials and resources. However, according to the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) the literacy rate remained highly pegged at 92%. This rosy picture may not tally with the reality on the ground.

What makes the picture misleading is that the UNDP literacy levels are determined by considering school enrolment and attendance figures without accounting for key variables like school curriculum and the quality of education a learner receives. Zimbabwe’s fast track land reform programme generated significant attention not only in southern Africa but even beyond, primarily due to its speed, scale and political rather than economic orientation as it sought to address the land ownership imbalances that had long been created by the colonial regime. However, little attention was paid to the impact this land reform programme would have on important facets like health and education in the newly settled areas. As the land reform programme gathered momentum, stop-gap measures to provide education to the resettled populations were adopted. This led to the mushrooming of satellite schools. To date, there are over seven hundred satellite schools on record, (Mutenga, 2012). The question to be answered is whether these provide access to quality education.

Langa (2012) notes that the Senate Thematic Committee has revealed that satellite schools are only a stop-gap measure as they fall far behind in terms of almost all ingredients expected of a conventional school. According to the same committee, the schools are just make-shift because from the first instance, they were not meant to be schools. According to Mutenga (2012), a survey on Grade five pupils that was done in schools in Manicaland province by the Ministry of Education, Arts, Sport and Culture established that on average the Grade fives’ literacy level was that of Grade twos. Such a result, coupled with the sentiments from the Minister of Education, Arts, Sport and Culture that the state of infrastructure, classrooms, teachers’ accommodation, ablution facilities at satellite schools ranges from non-existent, huts made of pole and dagga to dilapidated old farm houses and tobacco barns prompted the researchers to undertake this research in Mwenezi District starting by having a look at the just ended national Grade seven results of satellite schools and their mother schools. The idea here is that, if in Manicaland and in conventional schools things were as bad as described by Mutenga (2012) above, in satellite schools, things could be worse and a cause for concern.

DEFINITION OF TERMS

Satellite schools: a budding school operating under the auspices of a well-established mother school.

Mother school: a well-established school overseeing and serving as host for the satellite school primarily for administrative purposes.

Amnesty teacher: a teacher reinstated into the teaching fraternity on compassionate grounds having once left particularly for greener pastures during the economic melt-down in Zimbabwe.

Agrarian lenses: the biased perception of a newly resettled farmer when viewing negative consequences of the fast track land reform programme in Zimbabwe.

BEAM: Basic Education Assistance Module. A Zimbabwean initiative to cushion orphans and vulnerable children in school fees payment.

Hot-sitting: a practice of alternating access to the learning room by different groups of learners at different times.

BSPZ: Better Schools Programme in Zimbabwe.

ZIMSEC: Zimbabwe School Examinations Council.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The objectives of the study are:

- To examine the nature and appropriateness of educational standards at satellite primary schools.
- To investigate the challenges faced by satellite primary schools.
- To compare the performance of satellite primary schools against their mother schools at Grade seven national examinations.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- What is the nature and appropriateness of educational standards at satellite primary schools?
- What are the challenges faced by satellite primary schools?
- How significant is the performance of satellite primary schools and their mother schools at Grade seven level?
ASSUMPTIONS OF THE STUDY
- There are some educational provisions at satellite primary schools.
- There are some challenges faced by satellite primary schools.
- There are differences in performance between satellite primary schools and their mother schools.

HYPOTHESES
H₀: There is no significant difference between the performance of satellite primary schools and their mother schools.
H₁: There is a significant difference between the performance of satellite primary schools and their mother schools.

METHODOLOGY
The researchers used a survey. A survey enabled the researchers to find out what lay on the surface at the satellite schools and their mother schools through interviewing the teachers as well as observing resources and infrastructure at hand. Questionnaires were also administered to eighty teachers. The eighty included Teachers-in-Charge (TICs) of the six satellite schools, Heads of the six mother schools, thirty-four teachers from the mother schools and thirty-four from the satellite schools. The six TICs and six Heads were purposively sampled so that they would provide vital data from an administration perspective while convenient sampling was used for the rest of the staff sampled. The issue of triangulating these instruments was an attempt to validate and authenticate the data. A questionnaire was also extended to six School Development Committee members from the satellite schools. These too were purposively sampled as they were the committee chairpersons.

Biographical Data
A number of variables were considered among the respondents from which data was gathered ranging from gender, age, marital status, academic qualifications, professional qualifications and teaching experience. These variables will be discussed in this order beginning with gender. From the eighty respondents to the questionnaire, 46 (57.5%) were males and 34 (42.5%) were females. Therefore, the views obtained from the research are largely skewed in favour of perceptions of males. The age range of the participants shows that the majority were in the 20-25 age range, followed by the 26-30, then the 31-35 and finally the 36 years and above age range. The percentages show that the views obtained are from a cross-section of age ranges. In relation to the marital status, the study gathered that most participants are single followed by the married and then an equal number under the divorced and widowed. The respondents are largely single because of their age range of 20-25, notwithstanding that there are some single even outside this age range. In terms of academic qualifications, ‘O’ level holders were 52 (65%) whilst ‘A’ level holders were (28) 35%. This shows that ‘O’ level holders are in the majority. This is partly explained by the fact that ‘O’ Level is a pre-requisite for teacher training programmes. The professional qualifications of the participants included the Diploma in Education holders accounting for 45 (56.25%), Certificate in Education holders 12 (15%) whilst 8 (10%) of the respondents were Bachelor of Education degree holders. The holders of Bachelor’s degrees are entirely stationed at mother schools. The remaining 15 (18.75) comprising 9 from satellite schools and 6 from mother schools had no professional qualifications because they are still awaiting training. These were relief personnel for teachers on various forms of leave. In terms of experience, 30 (37.5%) were the newly qualified who had a teaching experience range of 1-5 years. In addition, 15 (18.75%) of the participants had a teaching experience range of 6-10 years whilst 10 (12.5%) had a teaching experience range of 11-15 years. Finally, only 10 (12.5%) participants had served 16 years or more in the teaching profession. The six parents interviewed had basic secondary education. This bi-data serves to authenticate that the respondents understood the gravity of issues at stake.

FINDINGS
The study established that approximately 48 (60%) of the participants agreed that satellite schools fail to attract qualified and experienced teachers largely due to the deplorable working conditions. For instance, these schools are located where the road network and transport systems are in bad shape or non-existent such that accessibility is not easy. About 25 (31.25%) of the participants were neutral on this issue whilst 7 (8.75%) disagreed with that assumption that satellite schools failed to significantly attract qualified and experienced teachers. The difference in opinion could be attributed to other factors. On the shortage of space as a key obstacle to effective teaching and learning, the study established that 55 (68.75%) agreed that this factor significantly militated against the quality of the learning process. This view was corroborated through the interviews. It was established that a substantial amount of learning and teaching time was lost especially during the season when learners are ‘heaped’ in one classroom whilst waiting for rains to subside. However, about 17 (21.25%) of the participants were neutral on the matter, whilst 8 (10%) disagreed with blaming of space shortage as an important variable in determining the quality of learning.

Another vital factor that affects the teaching and learning process is the inavailability of adequate furniture. For instance, the study established that 60 (75%) attributed lack of adequate furniture as a
serious impediment on the quality of results at satellite schools. From the interviews, it was noted that all the satellite schools, save for one, leave a lot to be desired as pupils lie on the dusty floors when writing instead of using desks and chairs. 15 (18.75%) had reservations on the actual impact of the lack of furniture on the learning, whilst only 5 (6.25%) disagree on this issue. These attribute the quality of results to be determined by other variables beside lack of furniture.

The issue of long distances that learners endure was found to have a profound impact on the quality of learning. 58 (72.5%) of the participants agreed that when pupils travel long distances, they get tired before the commencement of learning. However, 18 (22.5%) were neutral on the issue whilst 4 (5%) disagreed on this aspect. From the interviews carried out with the Heads, it was pointed out that the long distances had a serious burden on the learner, such that coupled with the shortage of furniture, the learner finds himself/herself in an uncomfortable situation that compromises achievement. Though sporting and academic facilities are supposed to be shared, the distances between the mother schools and their satellites makes it physically difficult. 68 (85%) of the participants contend that the mother school and its satellite do not share sporting and academic materials. However, from the interviews, it was noted that on needy circumstances, the Heads of the mother schools summoned the Teachers-in-Charge (TICs) of the satellite school to discuss issues pertaining to the running of the schools. 4 (5%) agreed that the mother school and the satellite school shared sporting and academic material. This can be further corroborated considering that the per capita grant comes straight to the mother school since some satellite schools do not have centre numbers. However, 8 (10%) of the participants were neutral on the issue. Regarding seminars between the mother schools and the satellite schools, the study established that 60 (75%) of the respondents indicated that the two learning institutions never held academic seminars together. The data obtained from interviews indicated that the seminars are rarely held except when the Better Schools Programme of Zimbabwe (BSPZ) cluster meetings on examinations are held. The study also established that none of the teachers at satellite schools were ZIMSEC item writers or Assistant Examiners. The only five Assistant Examiners are all from the primary schools sampled. However, 8 (10%) of the participants disagreed on this aspect. From the interviews carried out with the Heads, it was pointed out that the long distances to and fro would then endure walking long distances to and from school. Alternative, they would look for a central place where they could construct make shift classrooms. Alternatively, they would opt to find a central place where they could construct make shift classrooms. Alternatively, they would opt to find a central place where they could construct make shift classrooms. Alternatively, they would opt to find a central place where they could construct make shift classrooms. Alternatively, they would opt to find a central place where they could construct make shift classrooms. Alternatively, they would opt to find a central place where they could construct make shift classrooms. Alternatively, they would opt to find a central place where they could construct make shift classrooms. Alternatively, they would opt to find a central place where they could construct make shift classrooms. Alternatively, they would opt to find a central place where they could construct make shift classrooms. Alternatively, they would opt to find a central place where they could construct make shift classrooms.

DISCUSSION

All the six satellite schools owe their emergence to the resettlement programme which started in 2000. In terms of location the newly resettled farmers targeted houses of former farm owners as schools. Alternatively, they would opt to find a central place where they could construct make shift classrooms. Using former farm owners’ houses, though a noble idea, impacted negatively on some children who would then endure walking long distances to and from school. It was a common phenomenon for students to leave their homesteads well before dawn and return.
after dusk. The make-shift classrooms also had their problems. The majority of the classrooms had insecure or no doors at all. Ventilation was a problem in the over-crowded classrooms. This was further worsened by limited space in the rooms as they are by design houses turned into classrooms. Water was a scarce resource and at one satellite school, students drank water from a dam. Using stagnant water from pools and dams makes students vulnerable to a host of water borne diseases like bilharzia and cholera. The absence of a clinic nearby complicates the issue, hence historically, the satellite schools only scratch on the veneer in terms of provision of effective and quality education. That may explain why there is a significant gap in terms of performance between satellite schools and their mother schools.

The nature of the staff establishment at satellite schools also compromises the quality of educational provision. The following table summarises the staff establishment at the six satellite schools from which the sample was drawn.

Table 3: Staff establishment at the six satellite schools

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Satellite School</th>
<th>A</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>C</th>
<th>D</th>
<th>E</th>
<th>F</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Temporary Teachers</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Newly Qualified Teachers (1-5 yrs)</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Experienced Teachers (Over 5 yrs)</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male Teachers</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>9</td>
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<tr>
<td>Female Teachers</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
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<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>10</td>
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</table>

The study established that all the satellite schools were predominantly manned by temporary teachers and inexperienced teachers. Out of a total staff complement of fifty-six (56) for the six satellite schools, 38 (67.9%) constituted the temporary and inexperienced teachers. This indicates that satellite schools are failing to attract qualified and experienced teachers. Such failure may compromise quality of instruction by extension leading to poor service delivery. On their own, the 28 newly qualified teachers (1-5 years’ experience) accounted for 51.8% of the staff compliment. Majority of these were eager to get into the teaching service and did not want to go to faraway areas such as Matabeleland North and Mashonaland East and this is confirmed by sentiments from the Minister of Education, Arts, Sport and Culture who bemoans lack of experienced teachers at satellite schools (Mutenga, 2012). The 18 teachers with experience in excess of five years accounted for 32.1%. The research also established that the rest of these, save for three, were ‘amnesty teachers’. These had no choice but to be reinstated into the profession and deployed at the satellite schools. Of the three seasoned members who were not amnesty teachers, two were locals who had also benefited from the Land Reform programme. These might see the challenges bedevilling the satellite school with ‘agrarian lenses’. Conclusively, therefore, the satellite schools can be said to fail to attract experienced and qualified personnel at the detriment of the learners. No wonder why there was no one with even a Bachelor’s Degree in Education (Bed) amongst all the teachers at the satellite schools yet on the contrary, the mother schools had seasoned and highly qualified teachers. On that score therefore, failure to attract experienced teachers may attempt to explain why there is that gap in terms of performance.

It can also be noted that staffing is not stable at satellite schools. As a result, staff turn-over is rife because of the challenges which boggle the teachers. Motivation, according to Maslow is a key recipe for effective and quality delivery; yet amongst the myriad of challenges that compromise this delivery is teachers’ tormented dejection. The satellite schools are too far away from the mother school, in some cases extending to forty-two kilometres. The onset of the misery is witnessed on the first day at the mother school where the Head has to fill in assumption of duty forms and direct the new teacher to the satellite school which s/he him/herself has never visited before and has a scanty idea about its exact location. The roads are not user friendly and the very few prosperous farmers owning vehicles may pick one along the way if lucky, failure of which one has to resort to the use of donkey pulled scotch carts or brave the walk. The few classroom blocks at some of the satellite schools greet the new teacher and crudely assembled benches symbolise the only furniture treasured at the school. The block serves as the office, storeroom and classroom. In worse circumstances, some teachers end up seeking accommodation in the villages and pay some rentals. Their dignity, privacy and respect are eroded in the process. An attempt to motivate this particular teacher is like flogging a dead horse as his morale is in dire dejection.

The satellite school teacher believes that in terms of effort s/he cannot be equated to one who is at the mother school. The bone of contention lies in the issue of incentives. Teachers are aware that they get 10% of the school fees as incentives but parents from these resettlement areas are reluctant to pay school levies leaving the satellite school teacher in deeper anguish. Furthermore, most of the satellite schools do not have centre numbers and as such Basic Education Assistance Module (BEAM) funds, set aside to assist the less privileged, are directed to the Head of the mother school. The Minister of Education, Arts, Sport and Culture cited by Mutenga (2012) reiterates that BEAM funds meant to cushion orphans and vulnerable children (OVC) have failed to reach thousands of children and the situation is worse at
satellite schools which are not legally registered by the government. One wonders if intended beneficiaries get assistance from BEAM. In a way, failure to have that autonomy on the part of the Teacher-in-Charge (TIC) at the satellite school is a testimony that the two schools (mother school and satellite school) are miles apart. This may as well account for the significant difference in the performance of their learners.

The TICs at most of the satellite schools were newly qualified and they headed the so-called ‘amnesty teachers’ who had a wealth of experience behind them. The criterion to be a TIC was based on the virtue of having stayed the longest at the satellite school. The ‘amnesty teacher’ does not qualify for this position as per policy and poses a threat to newly qualified TIC. Supervision at the satellite schools becomes laissez-faire as the TIC normally opts for a lukewarm approach in dealing with one who is more often than not, senior to him or her. Even if the Head of the mother school could have had the needed authority, the distances between the mother school and the satellite school are prohibitive. Indirectly, this lack of supervision contributes towards the low pass rate at satellite schools. The Results Based Management (RBM) appraisal forms are just completed for their own sake. Hence, there is no genuine measurement of performance in such circumstances. Such lack of supervision seems to be a remarkable variable in accounting for the significant difference in the performance of satellite and mother schools.

The general culture in the locality also affects effective educational provision. The communities under study seem to prioritise the land at the expense of the education of their children. It is a common phenomenon to find parents and their children clearing vast acres of land during week days at the expense of attending school. The most popular produce includes bulrush millet and sorghum which they in turn use to brew opaque beer. The communities take pride in attending beer parties whilst some of their children are made to do household chores and tending crops in the fields from birds, baboons and monkeys. This is confirmed by Mutenga (2012) who quotes the Minister of Education, Arts, Sports and Culture lamenting the rate of absenteeism and temporary drop outs as parents engage their children as free farm labourers. This affects the value that some children eventually accord to education. Records at the satellite schools indicated marked absenteeism as compared to those at the mother schools. This seems to pin point the marked variability in terms of performance of the schools. The culture of temporary school drop-outs that is typical of satellite schools greatly militates against content coverage, continuity and any prospects of getting lucrative result in national examinations.

Another challenge bedevilling satellite schools that could as well contribute towards variance in their performance when measured up against mother schools relates to infrastructure. This challenge is usually pertinent during the rainy season. The rainy season greatly compromises the learning time for students as up to four grades can shelter in one classroom in anticipation for the rains to subside. Shortage of learning space has resulted in administrators adopting hot-sitting. According to Towindo (2012), hot sitting compromises general performance since student teacher contact time is limited and education experts have blamed this apparent disequilibrium for the poor performance of some satellite schools. The shortage of classrooms has created a bitter pill to swallow for the learner. To avoid the congestion in rooms, if teachers realise that it would be raining, they immediately dismiss the whole school.

CONCLUSIONS

From the discussion, it was noted that though both mother schools and satellite schools under study did not perform well in the just-ended Grade seven exams, there was a significant difference in their performance owing to quite a number of factors like location of the satellite school, the distance the learners travel to and from school, the morale of the teachers, supervision of teachers, poor infrastructure, lack of resources and the general attitude of parents. It can also be concluded that the provision of effective and quality education, given the above circumstances remains a pipe dream and that defeats all prospects of equity in educational provision. Satellite schools fail to attract qualified and experienced teachers and that indirectly affects the overall academic performance of pupils at these schools. The fact that UNICEF chipped in with textbooks is laudable, but without proper infrastructure for the upkeep and maintenance of these, in the long run, the outcry for more textbooks will resurface. Furthermore, the UNICEF consignment only contained text books for English, Maths, Shona, Ndebele and Science. This left a yawning gap in literature for such subjects as Home Economics and Religious and Moral Education among others. The absence of vibrant ECD centres is alarming particularly in the satellite schools. Without a sound base, learning is compromised.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- The rise of satellite schools was a result of a state initiated land reform programme. The state therefore has to come up with mechanisms to cushion these school children out of the murky waters of ‘educational mess,’ they are entangled in, if the dream of educational equity and equality is to be realised.
The state should not just expect communities to build schools but should be a major stakeholder in financing such buildings.

The government has to reconsider rural and hardship allowances for the obvious reason of attracting qualified and experienced teachers. In as much as those teachers at mother schools get fairly sound incentives, those at satellite schools will feel that their services are appreciated and valued through these rural and hardship allowances.

Despite local authorities lacking in terms of resource provision, the government has to partner with donors who may chip in with projects to improve facilities and amenities such as drilling boreholes and building clinics near satellite schools.

Some forms of donor support, such as salary supplement for staff at satellite schools can also uplift morale of teachers, but such initiatives should be result based.

The proceeds of the Educational Transition Fund (ETF) should have been earmarked specifically for satellite schools.

Parents and communities are a rich source of human capacities which can be tapped to enrich and improve the education of children. A sensitisation programme could be done where emphasis could be made on maintaining existing infrastructure and establishing new facilities through well-coordinated state supervision.

REFERENCES


