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EDUCATION ON THE EDGES: REFLECTION ON SATELLITE SCHOOLS IN BINGA DISTRICT, ZIMBABWE

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ABSTRACT

While government of Zimbabwe is lauded by its plausible success in education sector, this paper bemoans the disquieting state of satellite schools in the country. Backed by this background, the paper interrogates the state of satellite schools in rural areas of Zimbabwe. The information for this study was collected through the use of qualitative research design. Findings showed that teaching and learning conditions in the satellite schools is appalling, with dilapidated infrastructure, long distance travelled to school and general lack of investment channelled towards these schools. The paper proffered recommendations which include collaborative stakeholder engagement in revving the satellite schools in rural areas.

KEY TERMS: education, satellite schools, Binga District, Zimbabwe.

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INTRODUCTION

Globally, the importance of education in socioeconomic transformation of any society is recognised and rarely disputed. As result, there are hosts of international and local policies, laws and programmes designed to ensure that people get access to quality education. In Zimbabwe, social policies trapped during the colonial era were residual in nature, and also fragmented on racial lines in order to safeguard and stimulate the interests of the white minority. Many scholars (Abdi et al, 2006; Hawkins, 2013; Muzingili & Muchinako, 2016) observe that that in colonial Zimbabwe education was based on racial dualism, offering free and compulsory education to white children while for black children it was optional and parents had to pay for it. This created socio-economic imbalances on racial grounds as the whites were educationally supported by the then system of bottleneck education. Machingura (2012) observes that the bottleneck education was structured in the manner that all the excelled students were the once who were certified to proceed, for example, those who came up with many point at high schools enjoyed the privilege to go to universities. Predictably, this made the poor blacks who were attending poor schools to be jettisoned and opt for industrial training. While these colonial imbalances shaped the dynamics in post-colonial period, many scholars (Muzingili et al, 2017; Tarisayi, 2015) note that the coming of satellite schools is closely tied to Zimbabwe's Fast Track Land Reform Programme (FTLP). Satellite schools mostly act as an annex of mother schools (Muzingili et al, 2017) and their development are far from mother schools. Many studies (Hlupo & Tsikira, 2012; Muzingili et al., 2017; Tarisayi, 2015) have observed that satellite schools in Zimbabwe are neglected and suffer from superfluity of challenges which include; squalid infrastructure, acute shortage of resources, rampant school dropouts and general shortage of classrooms and accommodations. The major focus of this paper was to interrogate the situation prevailing in satellite schools in rural Zimbabwe.

OVERVIEW OF SATELLITE SCHOOLS IN RURAL ZIMBABWE

Zimbabwean government realised that education is a basic human right and that it is an investment in human capital which sustains and accelerates the rate of economic growth and socio- economic development (Shizha & Kariwo, 2011). Zimbabwean government ensured that all children are provided with an education in every locality with human habitants (Kabayanjiri, 2012). To this effect, former commercial farms structures were transformed into schools. This also goes in line with the government's aim of trying to fulfil the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), of which the provision of education is one of the fundamental goals to champion human capital and improve social capacity. Tuli (2009) asserts that education is the most effective means that society possesses for confronting the current challenges and also those of the future. An educated populace can successfully cohabit with the environment and people of other cultures without endangering the ability of future generations to meet their own needs (Mapako & Mareva, 2013; Muzingili & Muchinako, 2016). Such people know how to preserve the environment as well as how to nurture it for social and economic development. In both economic and psychosocial arena, education brings about social responsibility which is vital for sustainable development (Bajaj & Chiu, 2009). Therefore, Zimbabwe being a member of the United Nations Organisation is bound by the organisation's principles, of which one of them is ensuring universal primary school education among member states. This was later carried down by the Zimbabwean government by introducing satellite schools. At the present time, communities have been granted permission to open schools in name of satellite schools in the areas which seem to geographically distant from the already running schools (Muzingili et al, 2017). Community has a task to build pole and dagg structures to start as temporal structures that are in the bid to be transformed into better structures. However, observations are that these structures can remain for years without improvement (Muzingili et al., 2017; Tarisayi, 2015).

Satellite schools are normally unregistered; they operate attached to established schools (Hlupo & Tsikira, 2012). Their enrolments are part of the mother schools and are headed by Deputy Heads, but recently changes occurred. These satellite schools now stand on their own with their enrolment not part of mother schools. This means quite a lot on learning and teaching and might have a serious impact on the 'new settlers' and their children's perception of education. There is an acute shortage of resources in these satellite schools (Hawkins, 2013; Muzingili et al, 2017). Some scholars have observed that, it is very common to find pupils learning while seated on timber, bricks or on the floor (Marimira, 2010; Tarisayi, 2015). The teacher is the one privileged of being in possession of a text book which means pupils are deprived of individual exposure to such learning materials. In its quest to provide quality education, the Ministry of Primary and Secondary stipulates that teacher-pupil ratio be 1:40 and this means that teachers end up combining classes because the enrolments are too low in the satellite schools. That in itself has an undesirable bearing on teaching and learning. Before the recruitment of temporal teachers in January 2016, the bulk of the teachers in Binga satellite schools were untrained teachers as many trained teachers shorn of to teach in these schools due to ill fortified in both, learning and teaching material and teacher accommodation in fact infrastructure as a whole is still poor as long distances are involved from main roads (Hlupo & Tsikira, 2012; Langa, 2012).

Land reform neglected education in farming areas and establishment of satellite schools was an ‘after thought’ (Muzingili et al., 2017). This is because the polemics of land reform programme were shaped by political and electoral calculations at the expense of social services in farming areas. Such scenario pose a challenge to the contribution of education towards sustainable development since the conditions are not conducive for quality education required for sustainable development (Bajaj & Chiu, 2009). Therefore, the motive of this paper was to unravel the educational situation in satellite schools in Binga rural district, Zimbabwe.

RESEARCH DESIGN

Design and study location

The study took place in four satellite schools in rural places of Binga, Zimbabwe. These schools came from four cardinal points of Binga. A study of 2 primary annex schools and 2 secondary schools were chosen. These primary schools included Kalonga, Musenampongo and secondary satellite schools include Sizemba, Sinamusanga and Chibila. These schools have been chosen on the bases that they had been on hot debates of being lagging behind in structures and development. The study engaged a qualitative research paradigm. Qualitative research methods focus on discovering and understanding the experiences, perspectives, and thoughts of participants, that is, qualitative research explores meaning, purpose, or reality. In other words, qualitative research is a situated activity that locates the observer in the world.

Population, sample and sampling strategy

The study population was 363 pupils enrolled in 4 selected schools and 22 teachers in the same setting. The study selected 12 pupils (4 per each school) using availability sampling. From 12 selected pupils, 7 were males and 6 were females. The age range was between 12-18 and the average age at 16.4 years. Purposive sampling was used to select 4 school Headmasters from each of 4 selected schools. Using this method, school Headmasters as key informants were important in providing expert knowledge on issues related to satellite schools. Three (3) of 4 selected school Heads were acting and did not have University qualification but Diplomas in education. The other school Head had Bachelor of Arts Degree in History.

Data collection methods and research instruments

The researchers used in-depth interviews to collect data from the selected pupils. In-depth interview guide containing open-ended questions was used. This allowed an exploration of challenges facing pupils learning in satellite schools. In order to tap the knowledge and experience of selected school heads, key informants were also conducted using key informant guide. This also consisted of open-ended questions to allow deeper discussion of the issues under the study.

Ethical procedures

The researchers ensured that data collected from the participants was treated with utmost confidentiality through privacy and anonymity where the names of the participants were not included from data collection tools. The researchers made an effort to address the consent from respondents before their participation by informing them the purpose of the study. Research letter from District Education officer of Binga warranting the permission to conduct the study was given to the researchers. This letter was presented to the respondents before commencement of interviews and focus group discussions.

FINDINGS

The situation of satellite schools

The participants indicated hosts of challenges facing both pupils and school authorities in satellite schools. As per ethical obligations, names indicated below are not the real name of research participants.

Levy payment challenges

Findings revealed that most of pupils learning in satellite schools were unable to pay the needed school levies. It was found out that running satellite schools was very difficult because the fees were hard to come by. One of the schools Headmaster retorted that:

Some students who have sat for their Grade 7 tests have left without having paid fees for even a single term. When we engage some parents they argue that they could not put enough food on the table for their families so how could they be in a position to pay the fees (Mikel).

In support of the above, one of the pupils said that:

It is difficult us to pay fees because parents don't have money. Our parents are also struggling to buy food and clothes for us (Tapiwa).

The study discovered that parents resort to supplying their labour at school to cover their fees arrears. However, this was not enough as administration needs money to support the process of education delivery. School Heads admitted that non payment of fees impacted on service delivery in satellite schools because without money it is impossible to acquire the necessary teaching and learning resources.

Critical shortage of qualified and right personnel

The study discovered that the majority of teachers at ECD were paraprofessionals who did not have the requisite subjects to train as specialist ECD teachers. It was learnt that, the communities together with the administration appointed a paraprofessional from the community, who already has his/her own accommodation to defray accommodation expenses. Only one teacher from selected schools had specialist training in ECD, yet other teachers who were taking ECD classes were holders of diploma or certificate in education. One school head noted that:

We have a critical shortage of qualified ECD teachers. It is not easy to get qualified teachers in places like this. Sometimes we talk with parents to employ people who have 5 'O' levels to help us (Saveson).

It was observed that many teachers had no rudimentary training in ECD education. The state of affairs of pupils at lower grade level was highly pathetic in these satellite schools. In all play centres in the schools for ECD were just a simple shed and ladder made office. The findings revealed that many classes at the junior levels were bunched due to under staffing. This caused pupils to learn in discomfort. One of the school Heads noted that

The government unleashed untrained teachers in satellite schools because most qualified teachers want to be close urban areas. The majority of ECD teachers have a ratio over thirty with some exceeding 50 students (Johan).

This situation critically compromised the service delivery in satellite. The study learnt that the officially stipulated caregiver-child ratio in Zimbabwe was not being realised. The teachers themselves were not comfortable with the teacher-pupil ratio.

Inadequate furniture

Findings showed that sittings and writing places in most the satellite schools were not conducive. It was observed that schools did not have enough tables and chairs for children to use during learning period. Both pupils and school schoolHeads admitted that good handwriting is paramount in academic writing it was handicapped by the unavailability of furniture. The situation led pupils in satellite schools to build mud bunds as sitting places and uses their thighs as writing places. One of the pupils noted that

Tubelesya mazambia kuyalaans ikuti tukkale obotu akuti tutasizyi ma uniforms amabbuku" meaning we use wrappers to spread on the ground, so to avoid sullyng our uniforms and books (Thabani) .

One of the school head noted that

Building of a single classroom block will be a major achievement but the majority of learning places are made of pole and dagga structures roofed by thatch grass (Thandaile).

It observed that most of school structures were not conducive as pupils raised concerns of fear of collapsing of the roof tops during rainy season. One school head reiterated the story of once reported that at one secondary under study above faced this problem of roof collapse in 2014 which led to multiple injuries to the students who occupied the shed. Findings revealed that, in the case of rain, the only few class roomed blocks are used to safeguard the whole school. This also stopped some lessons when such weather was involved. Sometimes, windy blew through their holly and inbuilt walls of the sheds hence leaving them dusty. All these situations affected both learning and school attendance by pupils learning in satellite schools.

Water and sanitation

The study discovered that hygiene in the form of water and sanitation is still a big challenge in satellite schools. Both pupils and school Heads testified that safe water supply is not accessible in satellite schools in rural Binga.

The study showed that unprotected sources like river and wells were the chief supply of water in these satellite schools. One of the pupils noted that:

We face a lot of problems because of these sources of water. We sometimes contact Bilharzia because we drink unprotected water from open wells (Musiyé)

It was suggested by pupils that safe water was needed for their own use, and school use. Some of these schools had a borehole but the rest rely on river water and in most cases these water sources are distant from the schools. This forced pupils to travel long distances to fetch water.

Lack of resources

Findings revealed that rural satellite schools found it difficult to attract good and suitable teachers, because there are less financial resources available. Poor funding in rural schools is one of the greatest challenges faced by rural education. The low proportion of funds that are allocated to rural education is worrisome as it has been suffering from a bigger financial shortfall over the past few years. Shrinking spending on rural schooling has caused widespread problems in both students' enrolment and teacher commitment to work in rural areas. Besides, qualities of outcome, maintenance of facilities, also suffered considerably because of poor allocation of funds and other educational resources to rural schools.

Notably, it was revealed that teachers were not comfortable to work in satellite schools due to shortage of resources. One school Head reiterated that:

Conditions of service, incentives for teachers in rural areas need to be reviewed to make teaching in rural areas more attractive. We sometimes feel that we are the dumping ground of second hand equipment not used in urban schools (Motion).

Another school Head noted that:

Rural schools will never be successful if our schools are not provided with books, computers, technology and safe transportation. We suffer a lot" one school Head corresponded (Mathew).

The study findings revealed that rural satellite schools did not even have a budget to purchase any form of technology, books and other school operational costs. From selected schools, not even one satellite school had enough learning materials.

Language barrier

The study found out that the issue of language was major challenge for both teachers and children. It was extremely difficult to find qualified teachers who spoke the Tonga language which is spoken in Binga district. One school Head noted that:

Most of the teachers come from Shona and Ndebele background. It poses some challenge especially at ECD where English is not perfectly known. Parents always complain about this. Usually the teachers who end up staying are either from a rural background or have previous experience with rural communities (Luckson).

Another school head noted that:

Teachers see rural areas as a stumble block for professional advancement. There is a need for school administrators to have adequate knowledge of rural background before posting teachers who can fit into the school and community, and who will speak at least the basic of local language (Nyama).

The study observed that many teachers deployed are non-Tonga speaking and this has implication teaching at lower grades. Parents have highly raised concern on the issue but less was done to combat this issue. Local language teaching has been negatively affected as many schools went with a totality of non-Tonga speaking teachers. This affected more pupils at lower grades who were not well acquainted with English language.

DISCUSSION

Pupils learning in satellite schools face multiplicity of the challenges which have an implication on their human and social capital development. Levies payment was alluded to as a challenge by many pupils together in Binga rural satellite schools. Many scholars (Hlupo & Tsikira, 2012; Muzingili et al, 2017; Tarisayi, 2015) observe that many children learning in satellite schools come from poor families and they rarely pay their school fees. This is consistent with several scholars (Langa, 2012; Mapako & Mareva, 2013) as a major reason to why satellite schools do not have proper infrastructure and suitable furniture among others. Therefore, government effort to stimulate sustainable development through education and economic empowerment becomes futile because of these hosts of challenges militating against its efforts. It was observed that a well-trained ECD work force was scant to meet the increasing demand for high quality childcare as they were manned by paraprofessionals. Situation was worsened by shortage of teachers in satellite schools. Other studies (Hawkins, 2013; Mutale, 2015) note that good staffing ratios are another essential ingredient in quality childcare settings. There must be a sustainable ratio of staff to children at a centre that offers high quality services. In contrast, findings revealed that the situation is characterised by critical shortage of qualified personnel especially at lower grades.

Inappropriate infrastructure is one of the major challenge facing satellite schools in Binga District. Other studies (Mirimira, 2010; Muzingili & Muchinako, 2016; Tarisayi, 2015) found out schools in rural areas are characterised by dilapidated and shaky infrastructure. Infrastructure is one side which needs not to be isolated when looking in the academic service delivery. Shortage of proper infrastructure is attributed to; liquidity that has crippled these schools that even their yearly financial income (Newsday, 2015), and general lack of will among key stakeholders (Matema, 2014). Infrastructural challenges were related to hygienic malice which affected all these schools. Dusty places in both indoor and outdoor play centres marked the description of these schools. Like in other studies (Matema, 2014; Muzingili et al., 2017), teachers have expressed concerns about the quality of accommodation, classroom facilities, school resources and access to leisure activities. Mutale (2015) attribute this as an apparent neglect and the perceived lack of political will to develop to rural schools by government. This explains to why many qualified teachers in rural schools do not want to stay in those satellite schools due to social, professional and cultural isolation. Other studies (Alika & Egbochuku, 2009; Karabo & Natal, 2009; Newsday, 2015) observe that teachers' reluctance to work or stay in rural areas is caused low salaries, lack of access to professional opportunities. Owing to the small size of rural schools and communities, there is a smaller pool of applicants and teachers in rural areas, and rural schools have a high teacher turnover rate (Mutema, 2014). All this puts a challenge to school authorities to retain teachers at a rural school.

Unique to challenges facing the satellite schools in Binga District is language barrier between teachers and pupils. In literature, the discourse of language has been documented with scholars failing to reach unanimity on its implication on learners. The study by Yousefi (2016) established that there is also the benefit of bilingualism/multilingualism with regards to intellect and academic capacity, particularly for children in the early years of their life. However, other studies found out those children whose primary language is not the language of instruction in school are more likely to drop out of school or fail in early grades (Global Partnership for Education, 2014; United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation-UNESCO, 2008). While culturalist discourse argues that learning in local language allow children to keep in touch with their roots (UNESCO, 2008; Yousefi, 2016), studies further demonstrate that learning one's native language, particularly in the early years of childhood lead to children are more likely to enroll and succeed in school (Benson & Kosonen, 2013); parents are more likely to communicate with teachers and participate in their children's learning (Benson, 2002). Other scholars found out that rural children with less exposure to a dominant language stay in school longer and repeat grades less often (Benson & Kosonen, 2013). Research has shown that children's first language is the optimal language for literacy and learning throughout primary school (UNESCO, 2008 cited by Yousefi, 2016). Therefore, when native language is not a mode of instruction, it result parents not enrolling their children in school at all, children not able to engage successfully in learning tasks, teachers feeling overwhelmed by children's inability to participate, early experiences of school failure, and so on. Increasingly, it leads to an inability to communicate about more than mundane matters with parents and grandparents, and a rapid depletion of the minority repository of languages and dialects and the cultural knowledge that are carried through them. Without undermining the indispensability of bilingual or multilingual, monolingual at early stage of child development allows children to better. Despite the findings that children in multilingual education tend to develop better thinking skills compared to their monolingual peers (Bialystok, 2001; King & Mackey, 2007), ability to process several different thoughts at once (Yousefi, 2016) and ability to multi-task; native language improves teacher-pupil interaction.

CONCLUSION

Satellite schools constitute a significant proportion of Zimbabwean schools in many districts. It is imperative that needs of rural satellite schools are taken into account. The Government alone solve every educational problem in rural satellite schools settings. However, this can leverage its role in ways that improve outcomes for the nation's learners in rural geographic areas. The promise of education principles is to ensure that all learners have equal

access to a high quality of education. That promise cannot materialize if certain geographic segments of the population are not equitably served by the education system. Thus for Zimbabwe to accomplish the goal number 4 of the Sustainable Development Goals which emphasise inclusive and equitable quality education and promote life- long learning opportunities for all, much is to be done in the rural satellite schools to alleviate this inequality which schools lies in.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Policy options: There is a need reconsider education policies and Acts to ensure that rural schools are specifically attended. This invites the promulgation of new laws such as ‘education policy for rural schools’ to contextualise problems facing satellite schools in Zimbabwe.

Incentivisation of rural teachers: Mechanisms should be put in place to support and promote the retention of qualified and competent teachers in rural satellite schools with a view to improve the quality and working conditions of teachers in rural schools. This may include the compensation with additional financial incentives in the form of hardship allowance, travel allowance for teachers to go to rural areas.

Upgrading of satellite schools: Both communities and government must be actively involved in the upgrading and development of rural schools to meet the standards of quality education. The commitment to education in rural schools can be achieved through adequate provision of financial and human resources to rural schools.

Community empowerment: Parents must also be empowered and encouraged to help to tackle the challenges facing their children in satellite school. This can be through introduction of income generating projects to raise fees and be able to buy other materials affecting their children.

Adoption of local languages in education curriculum: learning of local language should be made compulsory in tertiary education programmes or qualification. This can empower teachers to teach anyway in Zimbabwe. This can ensure that the basic right to language cannot be compromised for local people.

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