

Economic Dynamics in Community Participation and their Impact on Quality of Basic Education: The Case for Three Rural Primary Schools in Zimbabwe.

Author's Details:

⁽¹⁾Sango Mesheck Godfrey - Zimbabwe Open University ⁽²⁾Saruchera Kenneth John - Zimbabwe Open University
⁽³⁾Nyatanga Elisha Kwedungepi- Zimbabwe Open University

Abstract

This study set out to investigate economic dynamics in community participation and how they impact on quality of basic education. The investigation was carried out in three primary schools in rural communities in Zimbabwe. The study was guided by the following research questions: How were communities participating in providing quality basic education; what were the economic dynamics influencing community participation; and how was the influence of economic dynamics on community participation impacting on quality of basic education? The constructivist research paradigm informed the research method in which qualitative data were generated through focus group discussions, in-depth interviews, observations, and document analysis. Data were analysed manually using the cut and sort technique. The study found out that economic dynamics that were driven by differences in level of income among community residents influenced the members' behaviour in participation activities and subsequently had some negative impact on quality of basic education in the schools. The economic dynamics had negative impact on children's readiness for learning, attendance at school, availability of teaching and learning materials, scope of curriculum, teacher commitment, and quality of teachers employed in the schools. The study recommended that rural Primary Schools be actively engaged in innovative fund raising activities; state educational subsidy needs to provide basic educational stationery for all children; state and donor agencies need to assist poor families in rural areas with basic feeding, uniforms, and school stationery. Finally, further research should be carried out to investigate socio-cultural dynamics that also seem to influence community participation and quality of basic education in rural primary schools.

Background to the Study

The concept of community participation in education is a popular practice in most countries and has now gained international prominence as a strategy for improving the quality of education. Governments and international agencies, who also happen to be leading advocates for community participation in education, have maintained that participation is a means for community residents to put into practice their democratic right in the education of their children (Bray, 2003). Democratic management of schools improves equal access to education through creating inclusive set up which satisfies local needs (Tiripathi and Bajpai, 2009). Equalising opportunity for accessing education is a significant measure of quality education (UNESCO, 2004).

However, for the World Conference on Education for All (WCEFA) held in Jomtien in 1990, community participation in providing basic education was a strategy for raising financial, material as well as human resources for achieving education for all aims and objectives. These communities, which include rural communities, participate through paying money to finance various school programmes, and volunteering labour when building school facilities such as classrooms and teachers' houses (Bray, 2000; Bray, 2003; Tshabalala, 2013).

The benefits of community participation in providing basic education are many. Teachers in schools that had high levels of community participation were seen to experience high levels of morale (Haq and Islam, 2005; Olsen and Fuller, 2012). Equally important, teachers would gain some deeper understanding of parents' diverse backgrounds and thus, tend to understand and appreciate their unique circumstances better. Therefore, teachers as well as school heads would receive more professional respect from parents and other community members because of increased contact and improved communication (Haq and Islam, 2005; Olsen and Fuller, 2012). For the children, Olsen and Fuller (2012) reveal that, they tend to improve their behaviour at school, develop stronger self-esteem; record higher test and class work scores, attend school more regularly and work consistently on their home work. Further, empowered communities have the potential to ensure that programmes and projects for their children are kept going through political, technical, managerial and humanitarian support systems (Williams, 1994; Penderis, 2012).

While these benefits from community participation in education are central to quality of basic education, their realisation is highly dependent on the context in which that participation takes place. Literature has shown that these contextual influences are to some extent similar and related to the idea of Maslow's hierarchy of needs (Chaskin et al., 2001). According to Chaskin et al., (2001) people need to have their basic needs met before they can begin to engage in anything beyond mere livelihood activities. The availability of these basic needs which are directly related to economic dynamics in communities (Wachowski, 2007; Penderis, 2012), govern and shape the nature and impact of community participation in providing basic education. This study therefore set out to investigate the economic dynamics that influence community participation and their subsequent impact on quality of basic education. The investigation was guided by the following research questions:

- How are communities participating in providing quality basic education?

- What economic dynamics are influencing community participation?
- How is the influence of economic dynamics on community participation impacting quality of basic education?

The research methodology

This study sought to find out economic dynamics that influenced community participation and how they impacted quality of basic education in primary schools. It is therefore imperative that those people involved in the ‘participation activities’ be given the opportunity to express their experiences, views, and opinions in participating in providing basic education as advised by Ritchie and Lewis (2003). It is in this process of sharing experiences with the community members that knowledge on economic dynamics, their influence, and impact on participation and quality of basic education is constructed as recommended by (Creswell, 2003; Babbie, 2010) . The study was thus carried out in a qualitative research paradigm in which in-depth interviews and focus group discussions were the principal data generation techniques. Document analysis and observation were used mainly to corroborate interview and focus group discussion data. Qualitative data that were generated and audio tape recorded were transcribed and manually analysed using the cut and sort method in line with advice from Kruger and Casey (2003). In the coding, comparing and contrasting process, themes emerged as the findings for this study.

The study population

The population for this study was made up of 150 rural primary schools in Mutare and Mutasa districts in Manicaland Province in Zimbabwe. These rural primary schools were located in communities with different economic backgrounds that included peasant farming, small scale commercial farming, and mixed farming in resettlement areas. The two districts had a combined population of 430 871 people (Zimbabwe National Statistical Agency, 2012). According to the Zimbabwe National Statistical Agency (2012), 16.4% and 24% of the economically active population [age range-30-50 years] in Mutare rural and Mutasa districts respectively were in paid employment, which included vending by rural subsistence farmers. In addition, 85% of the combined population was in the 30-50 years age range. Therefore, if 85% of the economically active group was in the 30 -50 years age range (Zimbabwe National Statistics Agency, 2012), then most of the parents and especially the younger ones may not have predictable and dependable incomes for effective participation in providing essential inputs for quality basic education for their children. According to Zimbabwe National Statistical Agency, (2012), 52, 6% of the school going age population [3-24 years] in Mutare rural and Mutasa districts, were in primary school. The primary school children were from 99 567 households with an average size of 4.2 persons (Central Statistics Office, 2012). The primary schools had a total of 3717 teachers (Provincial Education Director’s Report, 2013).

The Study Sample

The sample for this study was made up of 3 primary schools and their respective communities, one each from the peasant farming, small scale commercial farming, and ‘resettlement’ backgrounds. The three communities provided a wide range of the socio-economic backgrounds that were generally characteristic in rural areas in Zimbabwe. Primary School A was located in a resettlement area where the main economic activities of the people were mixed farming, gold panning and seasonal employment to provide labour on farms and saw mills nearby. Primary School B is situated in a traditional ‘communal area’ in which community members were mainly engaged in subsistence farming. Primary School C was located in a small scale farming area, where the main economic activity is small scale farming. Primary School A had a total enrolment of 145 pupils, School B had 298 pupils, and School C had 349 pupils who were in various grades, from Early Childhood Development (ECD) level to Grade 7 [end of primary education].

The Participants in the Study

The participants in this study were, parents of children in the schools, community members who did not have children in the school, village headmen, councillors, School Development Committee (SDC) members, School Heads, and teachers at the three schools as summarised in table 4.

Table 1 Summaries of the Research Participants and How they Participated in the Study.

Participants	Data collection technique	Total No of interviews/ focus group disc
Village head	In-depth Interview	3
School head	In-depth Interview	3
Local councillor	In-depth Interview	2
School development committee	Focus Group Discussion	3
Teachers	Focus Group Discussion	3
Female parents	Focus Group Discussion	3
Male parents	Focus Group Discussion	3
Female non parents	Focus Group Discussion	3
Male non parents	Focus Group Discussion	3
Total number of in-depth interviews		8
Total number of focus group discussions		18

Data Generation Procedure

In-depth interviews and the focus group discussions were the principal data generation methods that were used in this study. The two methods were used in combination to increase the number of community members who participated in the study, solicit in-depth information, and generate data in their natural environments. Focus group discussions, which could accommodate up to 12 participants at a time, were held with community members in their villages. In-depth interviews were held with the school head, councillor and headman at each school.

The study findings

Community contribution in providing basic education

Providing basic physiological needs for school children

This study found out that community members were preparing children for school through providing physiological needs. In all eighteen focus group discussions that were held, participants said parents ensured that children had been fed breakfast and were properly dressed for school. In a focus group discussion, one woman summarised the preparation saying: “*I feel I should care for the child so that he goes to school well bathed, and fed. I prepare a snack for break time... make sure he goes to school everyday.*”

This study found out that communities built and maintained schools for their children. The communities had constructed new classrooms, bore-holes, and play centres at their schools. As a community, members were obliged, through the headman to provide labour for construction and general work at their respective schools. The work was done voluntarily by the members of the community. A female participant, in a focus group discussion summed it up: “*It is our school. Our children come here. We are the parents of the children. We feel proud getting here and find it pleasant looking. We should work for it.*”

Another female participant highlighted:

When the school opened in January ...it was bush all over the school so we came and cut down the bushes...we were cutting grass...and covering up the ditches around...also men were lifting and repairing the fencing wire that had fallen.

Community members were, therefore contributing through preparing children for school, building and maintaining school facilities as well as grounds.

Monetary contributions to primary schools

The data that were generated and analysed in this study showed that parents were contributing money for funding school operations. In all three primary schools that participated in this study, parents said they were paying school levy for their children. In a focus group discussion, one SDC chairman summarised the issue of paying school levy thus:

We can say their [parents] major task is to contribute towards the school fund by paying for their children. This money is used to pay for various school requirements... So it is their paying that makes the school operate. The school does not get any other money from anywhere. The little from government...

The money that was paid in by parents was used for general administrative purposes, financing sporting activities, and paying teacher incentives.

Teaching and learning materials

The study also found out that community members were supplying stationery to schools. Parents, in focus group discussions, mentioned that they were contributing stationery for use by their children at school. Unlike stationery for teachers which was purchased from the school levy, stationery for children was bought by the parents and handed directly to their children. School documents that were analysed revealed that parents were providing each of their junior class children with a set of four A4 size writing exercise books, one Mathematics exercise book, a ball-pen, a pencil and a ruler. Each child in the infants' grades, which is from Grade One to Three, was to be provided with a set of three A5 size writing exercise books and one for Mathematics, a pencil and a ruler. All exercise books were expected to be covered and labelled. The stationery was to be replaced as and when any one of the items was used up or lost. Further, in the focus group discussions held with parents of the three schools, parents expressed that they supplied their children with textbooks.

Monitoring teaching and learning activities

The study revealed that community members were involved in monitoring attendance of the teachers at their respective schools. Community members monitored the movement of teachers in and out of the schools. The community members checked teachers' attendance to their classes. In a focus group discussion with the SDC one member emphasised:

As a member of the SDC member, I also need to check whether teachers are coming to school at the right time; this is because there was a time we had problems with parents saying teachers are coming late for school from townso we had an issue with parents (Bsdc 6:18).

The residents, besides monitoring the attendance of the teachers in their primary school, were also monitoring the behaviour of teachers in public within the community. In school B, the community members had raised complaints, through the SDC, about one young teacher who was allegedly drinking beer irresponsibly at the local bottle store. In addition to monitoring teachers' behaviour, parents were also involved in monitoring teaching and learning activities that went on in their schools. I observed that teachers were giving children some homework. Parents monitored the children in

doing homework and would check on children's mastery of school work. However, some parents did not monitor their children's homework.

However, monitoring children's homework is important to children's learning. Primary school children need parental guidance in doing homework (Cooper, 2008). Homework reinforces what children learn in class (Union of Professionals, 2011). Monitoring homework is important for improving the quality of education in schools (Protheroe, 2009).

Data generated in this study showed that one of the events on the school calendar in all three primary schools was the consultation day. This was a day set aside by the school for parents to come into the school and meet with the teacher to discuss their children's learning progress. Some of the school heads were happy with the way parents consulted with children's teachers. In an in-depth interview, one school head summed it up with:

In some cases they contribute when we invite them to come and see their children's books....consultations.....some of them express their sentimentsthose that they are happy with as well as what they are not happy about. They talk to an extent that teachers will have pointers to areas for improvement... because some say outright that, 'I am not seeing any progress with my child....I am not happy with that. Some praise the teacher....which motivates the teacher.

However, data revealed that some of the parents at primary schools that participated in this study did not attend consultation days regularly. The teachers were not happy with the low attendance that characterised most of their consultation days. In an in-depth interview one school head confirmed:

In one class it could be as low as 7 parents out of 43... In most situations it was the parents of the bright children who attend the consultation day activities more regularly than those of the slower ones. It is disappointing.....

Data revealed that some of the parents of children with learning problems did not attend consultation days because they believed that there was no more need for consulting for a slow learning child. In a focus group discussion, one teacher described his experience in which he had been told by a parent of a child with learning difficulties that, "*The child is too dull and had nothing to show me, therefore, there was no reason to waste time attending consultation day activities*"

This finding implies that parents who do not appreciate the value of attending consultation days did not attend consultation day activities. Therefore, they had limited dialogue with the teachers of their children. Davies (2000) emphasises that effective learning takes place when there is regular dialogue between teachers and parents over children's learning progress. Therefore, low attendance at consultations days reduces parent and teacher dialogue and subsequently the quality of education.

Involvement in teaching activities

This study also found out that some of the community members were involved in coaching school children in sport and traditional dances. The research data further revealed that each of the three primary schools that participated in this study had employed extra staff for their respective schools. However, the two ECD teachers who were employed by the communities were paraprofessionals who had little formal training in the work they were employed to do. This implies that the ECD teachers would not be as effective as trained teachers. Therefore, children would not benefit much from the programme. Since ECD programme is essential for effective learning in later years (RAND, 2005) the quality of children's learning in subsequent grades was likely to be compromised.

Involvement in decision making

The study established that community members were contributing in education through participating in school decision making processes. The SDC as an elected community representative in school administration sometimes called community members for meetings. However, data showed that in some of the meetings, the community members were not genuinely given space to voice their views. In some of the meetings the agenda was pre-set by the SDCs and ideas from the people were not considered. In a focus group discussion, one male participant summarised,

When we are called for meetings, the agenda is already set from the office; the issues that come from parents are not accepted. They simply say let us focus on what is on the agenda..., those are now

arising...and then they come too late in the meeting. There will be no time...it is not transparent. We have had several meetings which do not get to conclusions; meetings end in confusion as nobody will be listening to anyone...people will just be speaking anyhow. Sometimes people just walk out. We have had several of such meetings. It has happened for a long time.

This participation was instrumental in shaping the ultimate quality of basic education for their children. This finding is in line with the objectives of SDCs as stated in Statutory Instrument SI No 87 of 1992. However, differences in economic circumstances among community members and subsequent misunderstandings were likely to disturb effective community participation activities and thus quality of education.

Influence of Economic Dynamics on Community Participation in Educational Activities

Influence on selection of SDC members

Data that were generated and analysed in this study revealed that there were three broad income levels among the community, which were the relatively rich, the modest, and the poor. These different levels of community members' income were reflected in various activities as the community members participated in providing basic education. Paying school fees was one of the major responsibilities of parents of children in the schools. Critically, I observed that the processes involved in school fees issues were dominated by members of the higher level income group. The higher level income group members dominated from the SDC structures to the administration of the school fund. Different levels of participation were reflected in selection of people to become members of the SDC. Community members in the higher income level category were selected to become SDC members ahead of people from lower income levels. Data revealed that the poor members of the community themselves, also voted for people from the high income group as their representatives in the SDC. In a focus group discussion, one female participant summed it up, "*When selecting committee members, we look for someone who has something to show at his home. Someone who has property...one who is educated, one who pays fees on time.*" In an in-depth interview, one of the School heads confirmed, "*Most of the parents vote for one who are educated...someone who can speak English, someone who has property, a better life, and is generally respected.*"

From the voice of the participants, it meant those who were educated, had money to pay school fees timely, and were influential among community members were likely to be selected for SDC positions. This finding was in line with Bray (2003) who observed that many of the members of school boards were the elite in those communities. This implied that the low income group was not represented on the SDCs. Therefore, the economic experiences of poor members of the communities were most likely not represented in decisions made by SDCs.

Influence on determining fees levels

Data revealed that at the Annual General Meeting level, the different income levels were reflected in the various opinions that were put forward when discussing the level of school fees to be paid to the school. In all three primary schools, the amount of fees was decided during the AGM. I observed, in the AGM, that the SDC prepared a budget for the year and presented it for approval by parents at the AGM. The budget approval was a highly contested issue in which people from different income levels stood against each other. The debate on the amount of school levy to be paid was a heated one, and created disharmony among community members. Some of the community members who had presented a case for reducing the proposed budget 'to make it more affordable' were not happy with the final figure of US 20 dollars per child per term, and they abandoned the meeting prematurely and declared not to pay the new levy.

This scenario revealed contesting sets of diverse interests in the school levy issue. I observed that these interests were coming from (a) Teachers [School head, Deputy Head, and one teacher], (b) Higher Income parents-including the SDC, and (c) Low Income parents. This finding, which is in line with the theories guiding this study (Pretty, 1995; White, 1996; IAP2 2007), exposes critical participation dynamics, which are at the centre of this study. These participation dynamics impede school efforts to improve the quality of education.

Influence on payment of school fees

Data gathered in this study also revealed that the different levels of income were reflected in the rate with which parents paid school fees. Although, most of the parents from the higher income levels usually paid school fees on time, at the beginning of each term, some of the parents from the lower income levels, either paid fees in instalments or failed to pay completely. In an in-depth interview, one school head summarised thus,

There are groups of parents here... the young parents... those ones who are not employed and are busy looking for what to do in life are the majority and do not pay the fees. There are some who pay in part and don't even come into the school to explain. There are those few who pay on time. The majority give us problems...

During a data verification visit, I had an informal discussion with a young, alumnus, parent whose child was in Grade Three at his former primary school which also participated in this study. He revealed that, because he was frustrated by the decisions made by the SDC, he no longer liked to do anything for the school. Upon further probing, the young parent, when responding to a question on why he no longer liked his former school, confirmed:

Anobhowa madhara aya, kunyanya SDC yacho. Vanodaizira mari yakareba, yezera ravo vega, zvichemo havanzwi. Tingaita sei mudhara? [These seniors frustrate us, especially the SDC. They ask for large amounts of money, which, only they can afford. They don't listen to our plight. What can we do sir?].

It follows that there are parents who fail to pay school levy on time, or completely fail to pay the levy. This implies schools were delayed in getting the money they expected or at times got less than what they had budgeted for. This finding is similar to the finding by Nyandoro, Mapfumo, and Makoni (2013) in their survey of the effectiveness of SDCs in financial management in primary schools in Chimanimani District in Zimbabwe, in which they concluded that SDCs did not have enough money to finance their school budgets. Therefore, due to the differences in community members' income levels, schools failed to raise adequate money to finance their budgets.

Influence on supply of children's basic school needs

Data also showed that the different income levels of community members were also reflective in the parents' ability to supply children with essential school materials. Some of the parents expressed difficulty in affording school uniforms for their children. The prices of the uniforms at the local shops were not over priced and were affordable to the working class. In a focus group discussion, one male participant revealed: *"The money we work for is not even enough for the family upkeep. Sometimes you see the child coming to school without uniforms and has no shoes."* In agreement, one councillor added: *"These people have no money...they are not employed...they can't pay school fees, they can't afford uniforms."* Children without uniforms are likely to feel uncomfortable in their classes. Dorman (2002) advises that effective teaching and learning takes place when the psycho-social environment in the classroom is supportive. Hence, it implies that children without uniforms did not learn well in their classrooms. The younger and low income parents had challenges in providing exercise books and pens for their children's use at school. In a focus group discussion one participant confirmed: *"I have challenges in providing stationery. Sometimes exercise books get used up when I have no money."* In support, in a focus group discussion, a teacher remarked, *"Sometimes we help [buying books for them]. There are some whom you know, will not be able to get the materials from anywhere... It is just helping."*

Data that were generated and analysed for this study showed that, although some of the school children were well fed, others were hungry at the primary schools. Children came to school hungry and had difficulty in doing activities in subjects like Physical Education, Sport, and Agriculture. In some instances, children went to sleep during lessons because of hunger. In a focus group discussion, one parent summed it up,

Sometimes I fail to get enough food for the children. I fail to get food for them to eat before they go to school. There is drought and I did not harvest anything...I have no money to food...they just go to school without eating...

And in a focus group discussion, a teacher added,

There are children who end up sleeping in class because they are hungry. When you call out his name, you discover he has been asleep...you ask ...why are you sleeping? Madam... I am hungry....

Impact of economic dynamics on quality of basic education

Impact on teaching and learning processes

The study revealed that, as a result of the hunger experienced by school children teachers had challenges in covering planned work because some of the hungry children could not cope with given tasks. In a focus group discussion one teacher summarised the teachers' setback:

It affects my work...the child does not concentrate when I am working with her, when I am pacing up to cover the syllabus, that child has no energy to do that. The child's progress is.... we can say retarded, it's slow. I do not achieve my targets on time. You can see that participation by a well fed child is more than participation and concentration by a hungry child. When you engage children in games that require more energy, you see the hungry child failing to participate well..."

Consistent with these findings, Kleinman et al., (2002) in their study on the relationship between breakfast and academic performance on 97 school children in the United States observed that students at nutritional risk had significantly poorer grades and more behaviour problems than students who were not. Similarly, Lippman (2010) advises that, children, especially the younger ones, need to be well fed for them to have quality learning characteristics such as high concentration and participation levels in class activities. Therefore, children of parents who did not have enough food in their homes were likely to perform less than their potential.

This study found out that some of the children did not have exercise books for writing exercises in Mathematics, languages and content subjects. In a focus group discussion, one SDC member concurred: *"If you get into a class you can see that this child is not writing, that one has no pen.... this child has no exercise book, and that is the trend in the classes...."*

The study data revealed that teachers found it difficult to monitor children's learning progress as they did not have records of daily as well as end of unit evaluation marks. In a focus group discussion one teacher summed up their predicament:

The children do not learn well. It is not effective without exercise books. Even if you teach well, without the child writing it is not good..., without seeing whether the child is improving or not, without seeing whether the child has understood what I have taught....so all this affects the children...

This predicament seemed to affect the children's learning progress. The children were unlikely to perform at their best in the given circumstances. In a focus group discussion one teacher summarised the effect:

For those children whose parents provide what the school requires, if it is books they bring, if it is fees they pay, the children are found excelling really well, evidence that learning was really taking place. They pass outstandingly well. Like us teaching in the infant classes ...we get children scoring 25 out of 25. But those ones who don't have books, those who get books after 3 weeks, and during fees times they will be absent, they score marks as low as 3 marks only. You can see the variation 25 and another child scores 3. That's what it comes out like ... yes...have high potential... it's only the supplies that will be inadequate...

Therefore, some of the children, including those who had shown signs of high academic potential, did not seem to perform their best in class. Most of them had lower scores than those who had regular written work during lessons at school. This finding implied that children of parents who did not provide stationery were not performing to their best at school.

Impact on children's attendance at school

This study found out that children were frequently absent from school. Some of this absenteeism was a direct result of various economic dynamics in participation. In an in-depth interview, a head teacher summarised:

In this school, absenteeism is a problem. Sometimes a child is removed from the register....then later resurfaces. There are cases where children come to school for less than 10 days per term. You can even remove them from the register, only to find them come someday.

Data also revealed that some of the children whose parents had not paid school levy were sent back home by the SDCs. In a focus group discussion one SDC member confirmed: “We tell the child to go back home and remind the parent ...it is now too long before you have paid the fees” However, the low income parents were not happy with the move. One female participant in a focus group discussion summarised their disappointment:

They do not hesitate to send away our children away because of these issues of school fees. The child is sent back home...go and collect the money....and the child takes three to four days before going back to school. We are not happy with...

This strategy meant that children whose parents had not paid school levy would be absent from school. Therefore, some of the children from the low income group were losing learning time. In addition, school children who did not have exercise books or pens for written exercises were sent back home by the teachers so that parents would provide for them. A male teacher concurred: “I sometimes go to the office to ask for assistance... but if he doesn't have anything he tells me to send the child back home to get the required materials.” Some of the children absent themselves from school to avoid humiliation from inadequate school supplies. In a focus group discussion one male teacher confirmed: “The child feels ashamed to walk around the school without materials for use in class. The child ends up being truant and is absent from school. A teacher in a focus group discussion concluded: “so that's what we experience here, if the book is used up, they stop coming to school.

This study established that some of the children who were frequently absent from school ended up as dropouts of the system. In a focus group discussion one female participant confirmed: “when children are sent back home to collect fees, some of the children end up staying at home. They don't go back... for example the children who stay up there have not gone back to school.”

Quality basic education entails children persisting with learning up to the end of the cycle (Unicef, 2000; Unesco, 2004). This finding implies low persistence in the primary schools in this study. Therefore, economic dynamics in community participation were not promoting children's persistency in education and subsequently negatively influenced school effort to improve quality of education.

Impact on teacher commitment

This study established that some of the teachers who were teaching in the three primary schools that participated in this study were not motivated in doing their jobs. They were not happy with the way they were being paid the incentive money. The payments were irregular and the amount of incentive money was small. Data revealed that this incentive issue had strained teacher and parent relationships. The teachers appeared casual in their school business. In a focus group discussion, one male teacher summarised the teachers' general feeling:

It affects me as a teacher, why? Because in some schools around and especially urban areas, they get more meaningful incentives, but we are all civil servants with the same training... and you really see that you are behind. So I won't be able to do my work properly and whole heartedly. If I'm motivated I give more advanced class work...and even homework ... but without motivation, I just give the minimum....

The study established that some of the teachers left their classes unattended, when they boarded city bound commuter omnibuses well before the end of school day. The teachers had unsuccessfully negotiated for meaningful upward review with their respective SDCs. The study also found out that some of the teachers had adopted a 'go slow' mode of operation with their classes. In an in-depth interview one school head confirmed:

When it happened, it was related to the issue of incentives. When it started, teachers were getting to the extent of 'going slow'... and that was affecting the children....that ended up affecting the child in the classroom...I was worried....

Data revealed that parents were aware of and disturbed with the various ways through which the teachers were expressing their lack of commitment to teaching the children. In a focus group discussion, one male participant confirmed:

We know what the teachers are doing...we want teachers who are serious with our children....this is because of incentives. if you don't give the teacher money.....they don't work...they don't teach your child. We don't want to see children loitering outside the classrooms. They should be in their classrooms learning.

The literature that was reviewed in this study shows that teachers play a central role in children's learning processes (Stronge, 2014). Successful teaching and learning takes place when teachers are well motivated in doing their job (Haq and Islam, 2005). Generally, teachers in Zimbabwe were receiving low salaries (Madzimbamuto, 2012), and those in this study were receiving low incentive top up. This finding implies that teachers were not motivated in doing their jobs. Parents had not favourably influenced teacher motivation. Therefore, community participation had not favourably influenced quality of education in the schools.

Influence on the scope of school curriculum

The study found out that community participation had an influence on the scope of the curriculum that the primary schools could offer to the children. The study established that community participation influenced development of school facilities and the hiring of skilled manpower. In all the schools that participated in this study, the school heads had failed to introduce some of their locally desired school subjects due to lack of facilities and equipment. Data revealed that some of the schools did not have enough classroom facilities, sports fields, and equipment for their children. In a focus group discussion one teacher agreed:

Our school should have some computers for teaching children..., even home economics, we should have a special classroom where each class goes for home economics lessons where they actually do the ironing, the actual practical, and simple cooking since it is primary.

In support, a male teacher, in a focus group discussion added: "There should be equipment for Physical Education, Home Economics, and Carpentry." In support one SDC member concurred: "Our classrooms are so few. It is disturbing for Grade Six and Seven children to be learning in one room, facing different directions." A school head in an in-depth interview supported: "the classrooms should have electricity so that there will be computers, I can say all information technology taking place, it should happen in the classroom." In conclusion, one male participant, in a focus group discussion emphasised:

We need some tools for the school...like shovels, hoes...and a place where gardening activities can be done...If they are doing building...there should be a place where building lessons take place, there should be computers because you see that if our child competes with one from.... school, there will be a big difference because we don't have what they have there...

The situation in the schools implies school children did not have a wide range of relevant subjects as well as games and sporting activities on their school curriculum. One of the aspects of good quality school curriculum is relevancy to the educational aspirations of the people served by the school (Hawkes, 2009). The schools in this study did not meet some of the educational needs of the community members. Therefore, community participation hindered improvement of quality of education in the schools.

Influence on quality of ECD teachers

This study found out that schools did not have adequate financial resources to hire qualified teachers for the ECD classes. The parents had managed to get the services of unqualified local women to save as teachers for the ECD classes. In an in-depth interview one school head summed up the context:

We must have a well constructed ECD classroom, adequate teaching and learning materials, then we should also have someone who is qualified to teach the ECD, currently it is taught by a local woman...not properly trained.... the children learn very little.

The situation in the schools implies that the children in the ECD classes were being taught by unskilled teachers who did not have enough knowledge of content as well as appropriate teaching methods. Effective teachers are characterised by a high mastery of subject content knowledge, understanding of learning objectives to be achieved, and lesson delivery skills (Stronge, 2014). This means that untrained ECD teachers in the schools were not likely to neither provide a wholesome curriculum nor be effective in their teaching activities. Therefore, the untrained teachers that were hired by community members were inappropriate for the ECD classes and were likely to impede the improvement of quality in the schools' ECD programmes.

Recommendations

The study therefore, recommends that;

- Rural Primary School authorities need to promote equitable representation on SDC by different economic sections of the community.
- Rural Primary Schools need to actively engage in innovative fund raising activities that may mitigate the effects of low financial inflows.
- The state educational subsidy should provide basic educational stationery for all children.
- The state and donor agencies need to assist poor families in rural areas with basic feeding, uniforms, and school stationery
- Further research should be carried out to investigate socio-cultural dynamics that may influence community participation and how they influence quality of basic education in schools.

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