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ABSTRACT

Educational reforms introduced at Zimbabwe’s attainment of independence resulted in the emergence of two types of schools: those established prior to attainment of independence and those established after. Ever since, there has been a common trend in the results from the two types of schools. The trend has been that the learners in schools established after attainment of independence have been and are still performing poorly when compared to those in schools established prior to attainment of independence despite the fact that they were and are still controlled by the same government and responsible authorities; they follow the same curriculum; get teachers from the same institutions; and come from similar backgrounds and environments. This prompted the primary researcher, who shall herein be referred to as the researcher, to carry out an analysis of the factors accounting for the different academic attainment trends by O’ level learners in the two types of schools in high density areas of Harare including Chitungwiza. The research was based on O’ level examination results for the period between the year 2005 and 2010. The research paradigm was quantitative and the design was a survey carried out in nine schools established prior to attainment of independence and ten schools established after attainment of independence. The major research instruments were questionnaires which the researcher administered in person. Presentation of data was done in form of statistical tables, graphs and pie charts. After respondent and factor analysis, major factors accounting for the different academic attainment trends established were as follows: Form one enrolment criteria; availability or unavailability of library and laboratory facilities in the schools; streaming of learners according to ability; extra lessons and vacation school; class sizes; parental support for children’s education. The researcher then made the following recommendations: That the stakeholders of the secondary schools established after attainment of independence should make some effort to complete construction of these schools; there is need to establish whether or not primary schools are producing results good enough at Grade seven to feed into the secondary school system; each school in the high density areas of Harare should have in place a library and laboratory; there is need for the ministry responsible for secondary education to seriously consider and implement the recommendations made by the Nziramasanga commission.
INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

Education is first and foremost, political action, not only in Zimbabwe but the world over (Chivore 1993). On attainment of political independence in 1980, the Zimbabwean government adopted policies which were meant to improve the lives of the Zimbabweans in view of the oppression and unfairness they had suffered at the hands of the former colonisers. Such policies included educational reform. The implementation of the educational reform resulted in the construction and establishment of more secondary schools throughout Zimbabwe, Harare included. This resulted in the emerging of two types of state controlled secondary schools; those constructed before independence and those constructed after independence. This research focused on differences in performance by learners in the two school types. Learners in schools established after attainment of political independence, in 1980, produced poorer results at O’ level public examinations when compared to those students in schools which were established before independence. This prompted the primary researcher, with the assistance of the secondary researcher/supervisor, to embark on this research.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The objectives of the study were as follows:
1. To find out factors which negatively affect pupil learning and achievement in post-colonialestablished schools in Harare’s high density areas.
2. To establish the extent to which the parents, teachers, school heads, the government of Zimbabwe and responsible authorities influence learning and academic achievement in pre-independence and post-colonial established schools in Harare’s high density areas.
3. To find out factors promoting better achievement in pre-independence than in post-colonialestablished schools in Harare’s high density areas.
4. To identify areas which need attention in post-colonial schools in Harare’s high density areas in order to enhance learning and achievement.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study took a quantitative approach. It was quantitative in nature and in form of a survey. A survey is a research design used for exploratory and descriptive research. According to Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill (2009:144), the survey strategy is usually associated with the deductive approach. It is an approach that allows collection of large amounts of data from a large population in an economical way. The quantitative research methodology is virtually synonymous with positivist epistemology. The positivist research designs, according to Borg and Gall (1996), are strongly influenced by methods which include the collection and analysis of numerical data using statistical procedures. The use of mathematics to represent and analyse features of social reality is consistent with positivist epistemology.

RESEARCH DESIGN

This research was a simple survey which was carried out with the use of questionnaires. According to Borg and Gall (1996: 289), the term survey is frequently used to describe research that involves administering questionnaires or interviews. It is one of the quantitative research designs. The purpose of a survey is to use questionnaires or interviews to collect data from participants in a sample about their own characteristics, experiences, and opinions in order to generalize findings to a population that the sample is intended to represent. In this case respondents were identified for the survey.
In all selected schools. According to de Leew, Hox and Dillman (2008), the word survey is used most often to describe a method of gathering data from a sample of individuals. The survey involved the use of questionnaires with constructs covering such aspects as teacher motivation, school administration, screening and streaming, students’ background and home environment, school equipment and implements, the school curriculum, teachers’ training, experience and commitment, among others. These formed the basis upon which the questionnaires were developed. The researcher’s major survey instruments were the questionnaires in which the questions were listed in a fixed order for all respondents.

There were basically two categories of questions; demographic and content questions. Demographic questions comprise factual items seeking information about the respondent such as age, sex, occupation; marital status etc. Content items seek information on respondents’ opinions, attitudes, knowledge and their behaviour (Graziano and Raulin 2004). Questionnaires for teachers, heads of departments, deputy school heads and school heads were the major instruments used in this research. A pilot study was then carried out in which the concepts questionnaires were pretested for validity and reliability in two trust schools which were not included in the actual research. There was need to pre-test in order to come up questionnaires which would extract all the necessary and relevant information from the respondents. According to Leeuw, Hox and Dillman (2004), testing survey questionnaires is done in order to ensure that each individual question meets all the principles of good questionnaire design.

**POPULATION**

The target population for this research was made up of all state-run schools within Harare’s high density suburbs including Chitungwiza. The research was however carried out in selected districts within Harare’s high density suburbs for accessibility’s sake. For a survey it is important to have an intended population in mind, which, according to de Leew, Hox and Dillman (2008), should have a sample frame. This can be a list of the target population members. In this case the research targeted all state controlled secondary or high schools which were established prior to or after attainment of independence in the high density suburbs of Harare and the members of the target population were school heads, senior teachers, and other selected O’ Level teachers.

**SAMPLING TECHNIQUE**

According to Graziano and Raulin (2004), the heart of the survey is the sampling method used to ensure the representativeness of the sample. Surveys can be carried out as longitudinal or cross-sectional studies. In this case, the researcher applied the stratified sampling technique. Stratified sampling is when the sampling procedures ensure that sub-groups within the population are adequately representative of the population. The researcher had sub-groups in the form of school heads, heads of departments and other O’ level teachers from each school in the sample. The sample selected suited the purpose of this study.

**SAMPLE**

For this study, a sample of 49.5% of the total population was selected in order to add validity to the study since the minimum expected for a sample to produce valid and reliable results is 10%. 49.5% is way above the minimum percentage. The sample consisted of schools located in 3 of the districts in which high density state run schools are located. In all there are 40 state run schools in the 6 high density educational...
districts of Harare. 19 schools chosen represented 49.5% which makes the results generalisable to all state run schools in Harare’s high density suburbs.

Out of the 19 schools 9 were constructed prior to independence as F1 or F2 secondary schools. Nine out of the 19 schools in question were constructed after independence as new secondary schools. One was converted from primary school to secondary. These are, in total, 10 which are 50% of the total number of schools selected for the research.

A total number of 10 respondents were targeted from each school. These included 1 school head, 4 heads of departments and 5 other O’ level teachers from each of the schools concerned.

DATA ANALYSIS

After collection of the questionnaires upon completion by the respondents, the researcher coded the responses in each questionnaire. It was necessary to employ statistical techniques to analyse the data.

For this purpose the researcher employed the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) to input and analyse data. The data was then presented in form of simple statistics or frequencies aided with tables, bar graphs, gant charts and pie charts. Interpretation of the same then followed.

FINDINGS

The research revealed a number of factors responsible for the different academic attainment trends by O’ Level learners in the two types of school. From the school heads’ responses, the differences in the school heads’ gender, the maturity of the heads, their experience, their motivation, school infrastructure and the system of enrolment by the schools emerged as the major factors which contributed to the differences in academic attainment trends by learners in the two types of school at O’ Level.

i) Form One Enrolment:

According to Thompson, Detterman and Plomin (2001), genetic and environmental differences contribute to differences in performance and achievement. Cognition and achievement are affected by genetic influences. This is supported by Haralambos and Holborn (2008:626)who posit that an obvious explanation for differences in educational attainment is the intelligence of the individual. They add that amongst the determinants of educational performance and achievement is genetics. Students inherit genes that determine their performance and achievement from their parents that is Intelligence Quotient. Intelligence quotient is inherited from parents and enhanced by the environment in which the learner grows. In this research how the schools recruited and enrolled their Form One learners emerged as the most influential factor in the differences in academic attainment trends in schools established prior to attainment of independence and those established after attainment of independence.

The schools established before independence had the latitude to select those pupils with best results at Grade seven leaving those with poor results to enrol in schools established after attainment of independence. This is made possible by the fact that schools established prior to attainment of independence had better infrastructure and facilities. They also have made a name for themselves so they attract many prospective Form One learners, hence the wide range of choice. For this reason they enrol learners with high Intelligence Quotients. This has an impact on O’ Level results. Learners are supposed to choose schools of their choice within their vicinity but the schools established prior to independence were overwhelmed by applicants even from outside their areas of jurisdiction. They therefore had a wide range of choice regardless of where the students came from. This enabled them to select the
best leaving the poor performers, with low Intelligence Quotient, for the schools established after independence. From the teachers’ responses the issue of enrolment also emerged as the major factor accounting for the different academic attainment trends by O’ Level learners in schools established prior to attainment of independence and those in schools established after attainment of independence. 18.2% of the teachers in the schools established prior to attainment of independence indicated that at their schools enrolment was based on the best results at Grade Seven while only 5.2% of the teachers in schools established after attainment of independence indicated that enrolment was based on best Grade Seven results.

Additional information on what the teachers in schools established prior to attainment of independence thought was the reason for poor performance in their schools indicated that the major reason was the selection criteria.

T-tests were carried out to find means for the teachers’ responses on the variable on Form One enrolment. The responses from teachers in schools established prior to attainment of independence on this variable had a mean of 2.1692 while the responses from teachers in schools established after attainment of independence had a mean of 1.6234. This is an indication that there were differences in how enrolment was done in the two types of schools. It confirms the fact that schools established prior to attainment of independence selected those learners with the best results at Grade Seven into Form One and left those with poorer results to enrol in schools established after attainment of independence.

ii) Library Availability:
The availability or lack of a library at a school has serious repercussions on the performance of the learner. A library is one of the most useful and important components of the infrastructure within a school set up. The availability or lack of it has a great impact on the academic performance and attainment of the learner. In support of the necessity of having libraries in schools, The Nziramasanga Commission (1999) recommended that schools which were established after attainment of independence needed to be prioritized so as to raise their status to that of those established prior to attainment of independence or beyond. This in part referred to provision of such infrastructure as libraries and laboratories.

Supplementary reading, before, during and after school time assists learners in a big way. Learners who are deprived of the opportunity to have and use a library are seriously disadvantaged. The same applies to learners who are deprived of a laboratory in which to demonstrate and carry out scientific experiments. This is the predicament which the learners in schools established after attainment of independence encountered every day. They therefore could not match those in schools established prior to independence in terms of academic attainment.

Many schools established after attainment of independence did not have libraries, according to the teachers’ responses. Of the teachers in schools established prior to independence 46.7% responded that there were libraries at their schools while only 10.3% of those in schools established after attainment of independence said the same. This is a serious discrepancy and one of the major factors accounting for the difference in academic attainment trends.

T-tests carried out to establish the mean responses revealed that there were differences in the availability of libraries in schools established prior to attainment of independence and those established after. The mean response from the teachers in schools established prior to attainment of independence was 2.8939 while that from
teachers in schools established after attainment of independence was 1.9744.

iii) Laboratory Availability:
Just like the library, the availability or non-availability of a laboratory has serious consequences on learner performance. In schools established prior to attainment of independence there were science and computer laboratories while in many schools established after attainment of independence there were no laboratories. In schools established prior to independence 54.6% of teachers indicated that there were laboratories while in schools established after attainment of independence 37.2 % indicated that they had laboratories. This is therefore one of the factors accounting for the differences in academic attainment trends.

T-tests carried out on the variable on the availability of laboratories showed that the mean response from teachers in schools established prior to attainment of independence was 3.1818 while it was 2.6282 for the responses from the teachers in schools established after attainment of independence. This shows that there was a variation in terms of laboratory availability. This supports the fact that there were more libraries in schools established prior to attainment of independence than in schools established after attainment of independence.

iv) School Infrastructure and Other Resources:
One of the major factors that emerged as mainly responsible for the different academic attainment trends by learners in schools established prior to and after attainment of independence was the availability of school infrastructure in some schools and non-availability in others. Physical facilities are important because better facilities provide more motivating conditions for learning. The advocates for the social democracy theory like Marx (1818-83) and Bowles and Gintis (1976), cited in Haralambos and Holborn (2008), are of the view that in schools where facilities such as laboratories, libraries, textbooks and other learning materials are available the learners are likely to perform better than in schools where the same are not found.

The presence and active use of a school library will boost reading achievement. The presence of and instructional time spent in laboratories will raise science achievement. It emerged in the research that schools established prior to attainment of independence had infrastructure such as proper classrooms, laboratories, offices and store rooms in place while most of the schools established after attainment of independence did not have. Of the school heads in schools established prior to attainment of independence 37.5% indicated that there was adequate infrastructure in their schools while only 11.1% of the school heads in schools established after attainment of independence indicated that there was adequate infrastructure in their schools.

v) Learner’s Socio-economic Background:
The learners in most schools established prior to attainment of independence were accepted for enrolment on account of good Grade Seven results. Why they got better results than their counterparts in schools established after attainment of independence was probably due to better socio-economic status. Socio-economic status affects students’ performance and achievement. In their journal on student background and student achievement, Schoen, Cebulla and Finn (2003) pointed out that social class and socio-economic status have an influence on student academic performance and achievement. They added that social class and socio-economic status determine the type of school that a student attends and the facilities that the student is likely to use. To some extent social class and socio-economic status determine the treatment that a student
gets from the teachers and fellow students. Bowles and Gintis, (1976), in Haralambos and Holborn (2008), argue that class background is the most important factor influencing levels of attainment. Researchers such as Douglas (1960) as cited in Fuller(1987) proved that the above factors have an effect on school performance. Burch and Gussow (1970:266) cited in Fuller (1987) put an emphasis on socio-economic status’ effect on academic performance and achievement. They intimated that intellectual development does not take place in relation to some artificially isolated segment of the environment (i.e. the verbal, social and cognitive environment) but in relation to the child’s total environment i.e. physical and psychological as well as prenatal and postnatal. This is supported by Hoy (2006) who argues that it is generally accepted that children from lower socio-economic groups do less well in all these areas than do their counterparts from higher socio-economic groups.

In this research, more teachers in schools established prior to attainment of independence (42.4%) than those in schools established after attainment of independence (19.2%) indicated that their learners came to school looking well-fed. The backgrounds of the learners in this case proved to be among the factors accounting for better results in schools established prior to attainment of independence than those established after.

The response means from t-tests carried out on this variable supported this fact. Responses from teachers in schools established prior to attainment of independence had a mean of 3.0909 while those in schools established after attainment of independence had 2.7368.

vi) Streaming:
If students get places to attend a school which is negatively perceived, they tend to behave in a way consistent with the school type. Ross and Gray (2006) in their journal on school leadership and student achievement intimate that the reason many low status students fail to achieve in school is that their teachers, consciously or unconsciously, project a basically non supportive attitude towards them.

According to Ross and Gray (2006), streaming, banding, setting, and mixed ability are some of the factors that influence academic attainment. Schools at which these are practiced experience different academic achievements. Gwarinda (1999) posits that ability streaming can encourage elitism whereby the faster learners become a special group which might be better favoured by the teacher, receiving more social rewards and privileges. He adds that the teacher is likely to ignore or write off the slower groups as good for nothing.

More teachers in schools established before independence than those established after attainment of independence responded that their schools practised streaming. 65.2% of the teachers in schools established prior to attainment of independence and 50% of the teachers in schools established after attainment of independence respectively, responded that at their schools learners were streamed according to their abilities. Streaming was therefore one of the factors accounting for the different academic attainment trends. There was a significant difference between means on the variable on streaming. The mean for the responses from teachers in schools established prior to attainment of independence was 3.3485 while for those in schools established after attainment of independence was 2.000. This was in support of the fact that streaming was one of the causes of the differences in academic attainment in the two types of schools.

vii) Extra Lessons and Vacation School:
Glatter et al (1997), posit that the geography of different areas, the number and nature of
existing schools, and the tactics adopted by schools combine to determine how much and what sort of competition there is in particular areas. Brookover et al (1978), cited in Chivore (1994), noted that in the USA teachers in higher achieving schools spent larger proportions of class time in instruction due to their commitment and concern for their students’ achievement. Schools with higher achievement were likely to use more instructional activities in which groups of students learnt as teams rather than as individuals. Brookover et al (1978) adds that the length of instruction offered by the schools is bounded, in part, by available material resources. They, however, argue that in many settings, the length of the school day, time spent on particular curricular areas, and the efficient use of instructional time within classrooms is more strongly determined by management practices than by material inputs.

In both types of schools learners were given the chance to do extra lessons outside normal learning time and during weekends and holidays. However, more teachers (92.4%) in schools established prior to attainment of independence (83.7%) indicated that at their schools learners had the chance to do extra lessons and for vacation school. The issue of extra lessons and vacation schools therefore marginally contributed to the differences in academic attainment by the learners in the two school types.

viii) Class Size:
In the schools found in the high density areas of Harare, classes are generally large due to overwhelming demand for places. This has a negative impact on learning and performance. Thomson et al (1991) state that class size affects learning and achievement in the sense that fewer students per teacher will improve the quality of interaction and raise achievement. The Nziramasanga commission (1999) observed that classes were too large in Zimbabwean schools and recommended reviewing of the class size and teaching loads. However, this recommendation has not yet been implemented. Large classes are still very common in the state controlled schools.

More teachers in schools established after attainment of independence (78.3%) than those in schools established prior to attainment of independence (68.2%) indicated that their learners’ results were adversely affected by the large class sizes at the schools. Probably there were more schools with bigger classes in schools established after attainment of independence due to the fact that they enrolled last for Form One and just accepted all those who applied so that they could just fill up vacancies. This therefore was another factor accounting for the different academic attainment trends.

ix) Parental Concern:
Parental concern for children’s education is crucial. Ball (1994) posits that parental concern, habitus and cultural capital are influential and useful to educational attainment. Bourdieu (1973) in Haralambos and Holborn (2008), also states that the habitus acquired in the family is the basis of the structuring of school experiences. This habitus is strongly influenced by the family’s position in the class structure. Habitus defines a person’s identity (who they are, where they belong and what is appropriate for them). Dove (1963), as cited in Chivore (1994), argues that there are specific home environmental factors that affect student achievement. These factors include the parents’ persistent pressure for academic achievement for their children. Douglas et al (1964, 1970) quoted in Haralambos and Holborn (2008) found that parental interest and encouragement become increasingly important as a spur to high attainment as children grow older. They also attached importance to the child’s early
years, since, in many cases, performance during the first years of schooling is reflected throughout secondary school. They posit that encouragement from parents forms the basis for high achievement in the education system. Douglas et al (1964) were supported by Leon and Feinstein, (2003), also in Haralambos and Holborn (2008), who claim that the main factor influencing educational attainment was the degree of parental interest and support. They posit that class differences in parental support accounted for class differences in educational attainment. Feinstein (2003) pointed out that the positive effects of parental interest operate through motivation, discipline and support.

Of the teachers in schools established prior to attainment of independence, 34.8% indicated that parents with children in their schools showed concern for their children’s education while 27% of the teachers in schools established after attainment of independence indicated the same. This is therefore one of the underlying factors accounting for the differences in academic attainment trends.

x) School Heads’ Maturity:
Chikomba et al (1986) observed that the quality and efficiency of educational systems depend on the availability of competent planners and managers. All school heads in the schools established prior to attainment of independence and those established after were well experienced at the time of this research. However, there were more mature school heads in schools established prior to attainment of independence than in schools established after attainment of independence. 50% of the school heads in the schools established prior to attainment of independence were fifty or more than fifty years of age. In schools established after attainment of independence there were 33.3% school heads of that same age group. Possibly this was a contributory factor to the discrepancy in the academic attainment trends.

xi) School Heads’ Experience:
Nhundu (1991) highlighted that one of the problems arising from the rapid increase in the number of schools in Zimbabwe was the shortage of experienced headmasters which meant poor administrative practices in some schools. In this research, all the school heads in the schools in which the research was carried out were well experienced. However school heads with twenty or more years of secondary school work experience were more in schools established prior to attainment of independence than in schools established after attainment of independence. There were 75% school heads in this experience category in schools established before attainment of independence and 55.6% in the schools established after attainment of independence. Experience is crucial in the management of schools. It is therefore possibly one of the factors accounting for the discrepancy in academic performance, attainment and achievement by the learners in the two types of school in question.

xii) School Heads’ Motivation:
The motivation of school heads plays a critical role in the shaping of schools and their achievements. Generally, the school heads who were involved in the research were motivated by their salaries, incentives and other benefits. However, more school heads in schools established prior to attainment of independence than in schools established after indicated that they were motivated to work to the best of their ability. This is so because 87.5% of the school heads in schools established prior to attainment of independence responded that they were motivated while 66.7% of the school heads in schools established after attainment of independence responded that they were motivated. This therefore, is another factor that can possibly contribute to the discrepancy in results at O’ Level.
CONCLUSION

The expansion of the education sector after attainment of independence did not match the resources allocated to the education sector, especially the schools established thereafter. A discrepancy exists in secondary schools found in Harare’s high density areas whereby learners in schools established after attainment of independence perform poorly when compared to those in schools established prior to attainment of independence. This is caused by a variety of reasons herein referred to as the underlying factors accounting for different academic performance, attainment and achievement trends in the concerned schools. Of concern also is the product of the Zimbabwean primary school system. Does our primary school system produce the right caliber of pupil for Form one? If not, do we need a system that churns out Grade Seven products that do not meet our secondary school standards and still expect them to do well at O’ level and beyond? This is subject to further research.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The researcher recommended that:

The ministry responsible for education in secondary schools and all the other stakeholders of the secondary schools established after attainment of independence make some effort to complete construction of these schools. Some of them are still in infancy as far as their construction phases are concerned. More funds should be channeled towards the completion of the school phases so that there will be adequate infrastructure in the schools established after attainment of independence so that they do not play second fiddle to those schools established prior to attainment of independence.

1) There is need to look into the performance of primary schools to establish whether or not they are producing results good enough at Grade seven to feed into the secondary school system. There should not be many failures.

2) Each school in the high density areas of Harare should have in place a library and a laboratory.

3) Schools should perform to an extent that they are free to choose those learners they feel deserve a place as their pupils when it comes to enrolment at Form one. They should market themselves through production of good results even against all odds.

4) Teachers should apply themselves fully to their duty without any discrimination especially in terms of learners’ previous performance.

5) There is need for the ministry responsible for secondary education to seriously consider the recommendations made by the Nziramasanga commission (1999) and implement what the commission suggested.
REFERENCES