An Exploration of the Challenges Encountered By Satellite Schools in Masvingo District, Zimbabwe.

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Abstract

This paper explores the challenges facing satellite schools in Masvingo district. Data was generated through semi-structured interviews with teachers, school heads and parents in this study. The sample for this study constituted satellite schools in resettlement (land reform areas) in Masvingo district. The researcher purposively sampled fifty participants from a sample of five satellite schools in Masvingo district. The study findings revealed that satellite schools faced challenges which include water constraints, low enrolment, and poor working conditions for teachers, affiliations and levies, inadequate community support and cooperation, lack of resources among others. The study recommends that the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education should set up a special fund for supporting satellite schools. In addition, satellite schools should be exempted from paying affiliations and levies until they are registered.

Keywords: satellite schools, challenges, Masvingo district

1.0 Introduction

Discourse on the land reform in Zimbabwe has arguably been pluralistic and proffering a multiplicity of perspectives. Most research has been confined to political and economic narratives without necessarily interrogating the implications of the land reform on social services such as education. Mavundutse et al (2012) state that the advent of land reform in Zimbabwe since the year 2000 has had a profound impact across the socio-political landscape including education. The onset of the land reform has been accompanied by a new phenomenon in education of satellite schools. Langa (2012) state that the birth of satellite schools was a stop-gap measure since the schools do not meet the expectations of conventional schools. While Hlupo and Tsikira (2012:604) define a satellite school as, “budding school operating under the auspices of a well-established mother school. According to the Minister of Primary and Secondary Education, there are 1425 satellite schools in Zimbabwe (The Herald, 2014). According to the Report of the Thematic Committee on Millennium Development Goals on the provision of education in resettled areas the government of Zimbabwe has left the funding and construction of satellite schools to the community (Parliament of Zimbabwe, 2012).

2.0 Objectives of the study

This study was guided by the following objectives;
3.0 Methodology

Data for the study was gathered through semi-structured interviews with teachers, school heads and parents. Gill et al (2008) elucidates that semi-structured interviews involve numerous questions that make it easier to discover the parts that give meaning to the research and it also allows the interviewer to choose an impression of the interviewee or get them to explain their response more thoroughly. The researcher purposively sampled five (5) satellite schools and from these four (4) teachers, five (5) parents and one (1) school head per satellite school were sampled. Thus, the researcher utilised a sample of fifty participants.

4.0 Context of the study

The study was carried out in Masvingo district. The district has ten (10) satellite secondary schools. The satellite secondary schools are mainly located in areas inhabited by land reform programme beneficiaries. While a few satellite schools have been established in communal areas. Thus, the study area falls mainly within the resettlement areas of Masvingo district.

5.0 Validity

Struwig and Stead (2001:136) aver that validity is the extent to which a research design is scientifically sound or appropriately conducted. Simon (2011) elaborates that there are various approaches a researcher can use to address validity and reliability in qualitative studies, the most popular include: triangulation of information among different sources of data, receiving feedback from informants (member checking), and expert review. In this study, the researcher will triangulate sources of data as data will be obtained from school heads, teachers and parents. Thus, the utilisation of multiple data sources (teachers, heads and parents) enhanced validity of this study.

6.0 Ethical Considerations

Several ethical issues were given due cognisance in this study. Several ethical issues were considered while collecting data because data collection always costs someone something. Chireshe (2000:06) in Mugweni (2012:149) avers that ethics entail, “…. a moral philosophy that deals with making judgements, good or bad, proper or improper, approval or disapproval, right or wrong”. According to Wallman (2006:148), “ethics are the rules of conduct in research”. The researcher observed voluntary participation, confidentiality and anonymity in this study.

7.0 Findings of the study

7.1 Lack of resources

There was consensus among the participants in the study that the main challenge faced by satellite secondary schools in Masvingo district was lack of resources. It was noted by all the participants (100 %) that the establishment and construction of satellite schools was grossly affected by financial resource constraints. While, there was an apparent
need for funds to build classrooms, toilets and teacher’s accommodation at the budding schools, efforts were being hampered by lack of resources across the satellite schools.

In addition, the participants (80 %) in the study revealed that there was a lack of teaching materials. Teaching materials such as stationery, syllabi and textbooks were revealed as deficient among satellite secondary schools. Teachers who participated in the study also revealed that there were no funds at their schools to finance their attendance of subject panel workshops. Thus, the teachers were not abreast with latest developments in their respective subjects and teaching methods. Hence, the researcher noted that due to the lack of resources satellite secondary schools were facing a multiplicity of challenges.

7.2 Infrastructure

The study also revealed that satellite secondary schools had infrastructural challenges. The majority of participants (90 %) in the study stated that they did not have buildings that meet the minimum functionality requirements as stated by the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education. From the participant satellite schools only one school had two completed classroom blocks and two F14 teacher’s house. According to the Report of the Thematic Committee on Millennium Development Goals on the provision of education in resettlement areas for a school to qualify for registration it should have at least 2 F14 standard teachers house, at least two classroom blocks and adequate toilet facilities (1 hole: 20 girls and 1 hole:25 boys) (Parliament of Zimbabwe, 2012). From the study it can be revealed that the majority of satellite schools (80 %) do not have adequate infrastructure. The schools are operating from the buildings of primary schools and former farm houses (Hlupo & Tsikira, 2012).

The study also revealed that there was a critical shortage of accommodation at the satellite schools. Participants in the study, at one satellite school revealed that they were provided accommodation by a primary school which was four (4) km away from their school site. Thus, it meant that the teachers walked eight (8) kilometres every day to and from work. One respondent remarked, “Tinofamba makiromita gumi zuva rimwe nerimwe rinomera”. (We have have to walk ten kilometres to each and every day of the week to work). Thus, this further reveals glaringly that there was a dire accommodation crisis at the satellite schools.

7.3 Poor working conditions for teachers

The participants revealed that there were poor working conditions for teachers in satellite secondary schools. Seventy percent (70 %) of the participants working conditions for the teachers revealed that teachers working in satellite secondary schools were exposed to appalling and poor working conditions. As has already been highlighted that teachers at some satellite schools have to walk long distances to work. In addition, lack of resources and infrastructural constraints have a bearing on the working conditions of teachers. School
heads and teachers were unanimous about the appalling working conditions at satellite secondary schools. This finding concurs with the Mwenezi District Education Officer’s sentiments quoted by the Report of the Thematic Committee on Millennium Development Goals that it is actual unbelievable that there were still able to find teachers to take up posts at such schools (Parliament of Zimbabwe, 2012).

7.4 Affiliations and Levies

The participants in this study revealed that satellite secondary schools were being constrained by affiliations and levies. All secondary schools including satellite secondary schools are supposed to pay affiliations to the National Association of Secondary Heads (NASH), BSPZ as well as levies to the local district authority. The participants revealed that it was actually surprising that despite the evident financial challenges faced by satellite schools, the District Education officials, NASH and Local Authority still expects satellite schools to pay their dues. The incapacitating financial challenges are thus further compounded by these financial obligations. One school head stated, “The local authority has gone to the extent of engaging lawyers to force satellite schools to pay levies despite the glaring challenges at the schools”. Thus, the study revealed the insensitiveness of district education officials, NASH and the local authorities towards the plight of satellite schools in terms of affiliations to a greater extent.

7.5 Community Support and Cooperation

The participants (60%) exposed that satellite secondary schools were not getting support and cooperation from the community. The establishment of satellite schools has not been matched by the community support and cooperation which was evident during the establishment of rural ‘upper-top schools’ just after Zimbabwe’s independence. Participants in the study stated the parents and community have alternative schools for their children thus are not prepared to offer voluntary work at the satellite schools. However, the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education expects resettled communities to take up the initiative of constructing schools but such communities are scratching for a living (Parliament of Zimbabwe, 2012). Therefore, without the community support and cooperation the satellite secondary schools become constrained to a larger extent.

7.6 Low Enrolment

The challenges faced by satellite secondary schools were further compounded by the low enrolment according to the participants (80 %). The satellite schools it was bemoaned had discouraging enrolments as parents shunned the schools due to their lack of resources and poor infrastructure. Due to challenges facing satellite schools parents were opting to send their children to well established schools despite them being distant. Hence, low enrolment further constraints the satellite secondary schools’ capacity to mobilize resources for infrastructural development.

7.7 Water

The participants (90 %) revealed that they had constraints in terms of reliable sources of water at the satellite schools. The satellite secondary schools do not have
reliable sources of water within the stipulated distance of 500 metres as recommended by Project Sphere (2004). One participant revealed that, “The staff at our school has resorted to hiring a local farmer to fetch water using an ox-dram scotch cart from a borehole about 4 km away”. Therefore, water challenges further compound the dire situation at the satellite secondary making them less appalling to both staff and pupils to a greater extent.

7.8 Conflicts between traditional leadership and appointed leadership of land reform beneficiaries

The findings of this study revealed that there were perennial conflicts between traditional leadership and new leadership among the farmers. On participant elaborated that, “Madzishe nevakuru vemawar vets vakatowana pekurwira” (meaning The traditional leaders and the leadership of war veterans are using satellite schools as a fighting ground to assert their authority in the resettlement farms. Marongwe (2008:285) argues that there was the emergence of power and authority of new actors and institutions such as war veterans and committees of seven which emerged. Committees of seven are management committee made up of seven people put in place to take care of scheme. Thus, this poses a challenge on satellite schools as there is conflict over jurisdiction over the satellite schools. These apparent conflicts are more pronounced during school functions and moreso, when the school approaches the community for help. Hence, it can be revealed from this study that this role conflict between the traditional leadership and land reform beneficiary leadership poses a constraint on satellite schools.

8.0 Conclusion

From the foregoing, it can be concluded that there are a multiplicity of challenges faced by satellite schools in Masvingo district. These include lack of resources, infrastructural inadequacies, low enrolment, and poor working conditions for teachers, affiliations and levies and inadequate community support and cooperation.

9.0 Recommendations

From the findings of this study the researcher makes the following recommendations;

- Satellite schools should be exempted from paying affiliations and levies until they are well established and registered.
- The government should set up a special fund for supporting satellite schools.
- Parents should be engaged to contribute voluntary labour in the construction of satellite schools.

9.0 References


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


