Child Friendly Schools

By

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Research Article

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ABSTRACT

The phenomenal, massive and quantitative expansion of the Zimbabwean education system of 1980 resulted in significant challenges related to scarcity of resources. This study explored barriers to the promotion and development of Child Friendly Schools (CFS) a model developed to deal with all aspects affecting quality education in schools. The research was a case study of five (5) purposively sampled primary schools in Chiredzi district of Masvingo province, schools that are shunned by teachers. The data was collected through an analysis of the UNICEF framework for a rights-based Child-friendly educational systems to see how far schools fall within that framework. School heads, and teachers responded to structured questionnaires regarding challenges they encounter in their efforts to develop child friendly schools. Pupils and parents were interviewed in order to solicit their views on the state of their schools. The study found out that the absence of teaching and learning resources and ignorance of the convention on the rights of children contributed to the poor conditions in schools, conditions that thwart learning, not only at school but even at home, in the community and society at large. It was also established that most students are not aware of their rights; thought schooling was good as it is and were therefore not complaining. The research study recommended that the government has to intervene as a matter of urgency to see that these poor schools are adequately funded. There is need for all stakeholders to work together for the good of the schools thereby promoting quality by creating a conducive atmosphere for the teaching and learning process. This will enhance the creation of child friendly schools.

Keywords: Child-Friendly Schools model Challenges.

INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

Soon after independence, the Zimbabwean government came up with Education for All (EFA) and the Free primary education, policies that saw the education system developing quantitatively with enrolments in primary schools rising from 1 235 994 in 1980 to 2 281 895 in 1990 an increase of 84.6%. (Nyagura, 1993). Correspondingly primary school teachers increased from 28 455 in 1980 to 59 496 in 1990. This massive quantitative expansion resulted in significant challenges related in scarcity of resources. According to Katanda (2010) critics of this expansion have argued that quality education was sacrificed for quantity. They bemoan the fact that the Zimbabwean government was investing substantial resources into the education sector and yet, 29 years after independance, there was very little to show for it. “All there is to see today is a rundown education system on the brink of collapse”, (The Financial Gazette, September 24-30 (2009;7). To date students are seen learning outside under trees. (Sunday Mail, February 19-26, 2012). There is lack of adequate or improved classroom space, desks, chairs; equipment and basic stationery like chalk (Tavengwa 2006). The situation was echoed by the secretary of education and culture's annual report for the year ending 31 December 1993, which acknowledged the situation in rural schools as suffering from unsuitable and inadequate classrooms and poor teachers' houses. These schools can be said to be in difficult circumstances especially with their weak local funding (Verspoor 2006).

Teachers, especially in rural areas are said to be in difficult situations as well. Every societal malfunctioning, affects their work in the classroom especially poverty. There are many factors that affect their production of quality outcomes. This is mainly because most rural schools cater for the economically and socially disadvantaged communities who cannot afford to meet the basic educational facilities and resources. (Nyagura 1991). It cannot be denied that quality education and the production of good school results depend on competent, motivated teachers and environments conducive to learning (Jones 1998). Adeyemo (2007) also confirmed that when teachers are satisfied with their job, their confidence to make positive impact is enhanced.

Observation of these poor conditions in schools shifted the main thrust of the Zimbabwean education system in the 1990s from expansion to improving the quality and relevance of education. The shift, according to the Better Schools Programme (Zimbabwe) BSP(Z) module A accounts four (4) key factors namely:

- acquisition of basic knowledge, skills and relevant attitudes by all students
- all students, and not only the gifted ones, realise their full potential.
• Substantial numbers of school leavers find life rewarding and satisfying
• That there be a close match between what schools produce and the expectations and aspirations of the public, the private sectors, teachers and students

The attainment of this quality education has, however, become elusive for most schools especially in rural areas. These schools are characterised by very little development values, high failure rates, absenteeism and discipline problems among both teachers and pupils (Scott 1999). There is therefore, need for a paradigm shift where schools focus on helping pupils to learn so that they acquire effective life skills to help them think creatively, make choices and solve problems if they are to develop into mature, responsible and successful individuals. If this is not done, bad schools result where children suffer from laziness and indifference, gross incompetence or unkindness on the part of the staff (Silver 1994). This is also supported by Duke (1999) who asserts that learning should be understood to encompass the application of knowledge more than just its acquisition. There is, therefore, need to make schooling experiences develop the children's potential to the fullest extent possible. This need gave birth to the Child-Friendly Schools model, an approach which enhances the delivery of quality education. It emanated from the United Nations' Convention on the Rights of the children which came into force on 2 September 1990 to which Zimbabwe is a signatory. It came as a discovery that schooling is not always a positive and friendly experience for our children. There are conditions, according to the then Secretary of Education, Sport, Arts and Culture Doctor Mahere that thwart learning, not only at school, but also in the home, community and society. The Child Friendly Schools model comes in to create congenial, conducive and friendly learning environments and improve the quality of education. It is there to compensate for any shortcomings in the home and community that might make it difficult for children to enrol in school, attend regularly and succeed in their studies. In fact Child-Friendly Schools model deals with all factors affecting quality in schools. There was need therefore, to find out how effective the model is in Zimbabwe.

Theoretical Framework

The Child-friendly schools concept is said to have emerged in the 1990s in Asia. It was a response to the framework for a rights based child friendly concept developed by UNICEF. The framework encourages all social systems and agencies which affect children to operate within the principles of the convention on the rights of the child of which Zimbabwe is a signatory. This is particularly true for schools as they serve a large percentage of children of primary school age. These rights based schools must not only help children realise their rights to a basic education of a good quality but to also help children to learn what they need to learn to face future challenges. It incorporates latest thinking in pedagogy and child development as a way of promoting quality education in a country.

Within the rights-based framework schools must have the following basic characteristics. Firstly, they must be child-seeking schools. Schools must actively identify excluded children to get them enrolled in school and included in learning. All children are to be treated as subjects with rights and the states as duty bearers with obligations to fulfill these rights. Secondly, the schools have to be child-centred schools, that is acting in the best interest of the child leading to the realisation of the children's full potential. The model is simple and encourages the following:

• Schools that operate in the best interest of the child, respecting the child's unique background and circumstances
• Educational environments that are safe, healthy and protective, environments build upon the assets that children bring from homes and communities
• Schools that are endowed with trained teachers, adequate resources and appropriate physical, emotional and social conditions for learning
• Schools that protect children's rights and make their voices heard
• Schools that promote inclusiveness, gender sensitivity, tolerance and personal empowerment.

Within the education system, it can safely be concluded that Child Friendly School model is a means to supporting a dynamic, constantly evolving improvement in the overall education quality (Fushim 2010). The term may be new but many of its aspects are already familiar. It is UNICEF's signature means to advocate for and promote quality education for our children. Characteristics of schools are important determinants of quality education and academic achievements. There is also a growing agreement among educationists that all people can learn under the right conditions. It is therefore, imperative that all schools should try to develop environments conducive to learning. Is it then the situation in Zimbabwean schools, when schools attain a zero (0%) pass rate? It cannot be said to be so. The Child Friendly Schools model has to come in but the question is “Is it a possible plan or it is just a pipe dream?”
Sources and Generation of Data

The study was carried out to establish the extent to which the Zimbabwean schools are child friendly. It also sought to establish how far schools have gone as far as developing child friendly environments is concerned as advocated by the adopted model.

The research was a case study that used interviews and documents analysis i.e. registers and examination results analysis for the year 2011 to collect qualitative data. A total of five (5) primary schools were studied. The schools were purposively selected as schools in rural areas and are shunned by most teachers. The number five (5) is, however, of no significance except for its manageability. They could have been more. The population was made up of five school heads, five grade seven teachers and fifty 2012 grade seven pupils, 10 from each of the five schools. Parents were represented by five School Development Committee (SDC) members interviewed, one per each school. All participants responded to interview questions from the researcher in order to get information on the state of the selected schools. It enabled the researcher to capture views, opinions, attitudes and perceptions of the interviewees.

DATA ANALYSIS

Schools’ Appearance

It was observed that the schools seen looked very old in terms of their appearance. None of the schools had new building neither have they been painted in recent years. This situation makes the schools not attractive at all.

Classroom situation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SCHOOL</th>
<th>ENROLMENTS</th>
<th>NO. OF CLASSROOMS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>193</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>350</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>392</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>349</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E</td>
<td>234</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

From the above figures, it is clear that four schools, A, C, D and E do not have enough classrooms. What it means is that some grades do learn outside or the schools practice hot seating.

As early as 1982 Ronald Edmonds observed that characteristics of schools are important determinants of academic achievements. There is also a growing agreement among educationist that all people can learn under right conditions. The conditions seen in schools do not seem to promote better achievements. A school must have an environment of good quality in order to promote the self-esteem of children. But, with their poor funding, the schools’ tendency to become child friendly is not known.

Retention of pupils in school

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SCHOOL</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>7</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>88</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>92</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>323</td>
<td>222</td>
<td>181</td>
<td>178</td>
<td>188</td>
<td>153</td>
<td>142</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The overall picture we get from Table II is that not all pupils who are admitted in grade one complete the full circle of primary schooling. Looking at school C we see that it started in 2006 with an enrolment of 53 but there are only 16 in Grade seven this year 2012. Where the other 37 have gone to is a cause for concern. A child friendly school must be a child seeking school. It must actively identify excluded children to get them enrolled and included in learning, through effective monitoring and community partnerships. Child-friendly schools model must compensate for any short comings in the home and community that might make it difficult for children to enrol in
schools and attend regularly and succeed in their studies. This is not the case in schools since even the Heads and teachers did not know the whereabouts of some of the missing students. Few were said to have been transferred to other schools and a few girls were said to have dropped out due to early marriages. The figures above show that pupils do, at times, enter school, dropout and perhaps re-enter at will, causing great wastage, a feature of unfriendly schools.

Public examination results for Grade seven classes of 2006-2011

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Schools</th>
<th>Years</th>
<th>2006</th>
<th>2007</th>
<th>2008</th>
<th>2009</th>
<th>2010</th>
<th>2011</th>
<th>Provincial 2012 Mid-Years</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>38%</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>36%</td>
<td>41%</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>38%</td>
<td>12.5%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>32%</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>28%</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

To be a child-friendly school, the particular institution should be effective with children. This includes the promotion of good quality teaching and learning which will result in good examination results. For some schools there are no results to talk about really for they obtain zero percent pass rates all the years. Although there are other factors that may affect the attainment of good examination results, zero percent pass rates can be eradicated if quality teaching-learning processes with child-centred and life skills based approaches are applied to promote quality learning.

The Education Transition Fund (UNICEF Zimbabwe) concept note of August 2009 noted that hyperinflation led to rising costs resulting in severe shortages of teaching and learning materials. They also noted the rapid decline of the Grade seven examination pass rates from 53% in 1999 to 33% in 2007. With these difficulties, creation of child-friendly schools becomes a problem. With the results shown on Table III it is clear that not all pupils are able to proceed to form one and this is a great wastage, not of materials but human life (Dewey 1990)

Staff Turnover

The staff turnover at these schools is very high. Most teachers expressed the view that they are not happy to be at their stations of work. Those who have stayed longest have been there for only four years. Most heads and parents confirmed that these teachers just come to go. One teacher even said, “Zvikoro izvi ndezvekungopindira basa” (These are our entry points for work). As soon as they get jobs, they seek transfers to some other districts. No teacher wants to work in these schools unless if it is their home area. Some said they cannot bear the heat in these areas and also the malaria causing mosquitoes.

Teachers play a pivotal role in the process of promoting change within their classrooms as well as in schools and the education system in general. The success of CFS model will depend, to a large extent, on teachers’ involvement. The teacher’s qualifications and experience are very important in this regards but more significantly the pedagogic style practiced by teachers need to be child-centred. Effective teaching and learning is a tenet of CFS model which can only be realized when teachers are motivated and committed to their work. It is when they employ child-centred, activity oriented teaching methodologies that their teaching becomes effective and make children more effective and be able to realize their full potential and definitely the 0% pass rate will be eradicated. It is, however unfortunate that teachers interviewed showed that practicing child-centred methods was really a pipe dream due to lack of resources, “We resort to our traditional method of lecturing because we don’t have resources and you cannot buy them with the meagre salaries we are given”, responses were given freely.

Health Facilities

The child friendly schools model promotes and demonstrates a broad definition of quality. One very important thing the learning environment has to provide are facilities with adequate classrooms, clean water supplies and sanitation.
Table IV: Availability of ablution blocks

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SCHOOL</th>
<th>ENROLMENT</th>
<th>SQUAT HOLES</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>220</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>360</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>133</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>392</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E</td>
<td>234</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The ablution blocks available have bad and unkempt toilets. People get water from boreholes shared with the community in most cases and are a distance away from the school. Schools cannot afford to employ people to clean these toilets so pupils take turns to wash them. This is not a very healthy situation taking into account that some of these children are quite young for that job. The child friendly schools model does not promote this practice which makes the whole learning institution unfriendly to the pupils. Some pupils who were interviewed showed that they really hated the practice. One even said, “Ini ndinorovha kana riri zuva redu rokusuka matoilets,” (I absent myself if we are on duty for cleaning the toilets).

Community Participation

The five SDA members interviewed, expressed their sentiments freely. They felt that schools were not involving them enough in school affairs. They are only called to the school when the heads wanted to increase fees or when they are to do some work at the school as a community.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The search for quality is at the very heart of human endeavour from time in memorial. In education systems worldwide, it is as old as education itself. Innumerable research efforts on quality have been conducted along with commissions of inquiry and committees being set up to look into the educational institution. Mountains of literature have been written and a whole plethora of educational reforms done all in search for quality. It can safely be concluded that, with the situation in our schools, the quality is as elusive as it defies definition. As is the horizon to the traveller so is quality to educationists. It keeps beckoning to us hence the reason why education is in a constant state of flux. People are introducing new models for schools improvements all the time but with very little success.

The findings suggest that there is need to cascade suggested reforms to all stake holders and also supervise their implementation. Heads, teachers, pupils and parents are not aware of the convention on the rights of children which is the basis for the Child Friendly School model which we cannot afford to ignore as a nation, for it deals with all aspects that assist our children to learn effectively for good results. Heads of schools and all stake holders must also make an effort to make sure all primary school aged pupils are in school. They must actively identify excluded children to get them enrolled and learn. The situation where we have almost only half of a cohort completing grade seven is unhealthy. Children must fully realize their right to a basic education of good quality in all schools.

Child-friendly schools must be effective with children. They must promote good quality teaching and learning, provide good quality materials and resources, enhance teachers’ capacity, moral, commitment, status, income and promote quality learning outcomes.

Educational leadership for CFS must monitor the processes. It should be a continuous process not a one shot operation if at all implementation is to succeed. Strengths and weaknesses must be identified and make proposals for action basing on what is considered to be of “quality”. The fundamental rationale and most critical reason for monitoring and evaluation is to enable implementing organizations (schools) to gauge progress and determine whether the model is working as expected. Innovations are often judged as failures when in fact they simply have not been properly implemented or given a chance to work.

Every country needs to embrace this concept of quality which goes well beyond pedagogic excellence and purely academic performance outcomes. The focus should be on the needs of the child as a whole not just academic performance dimension that educators have concentrated on. People must dwell on a multi-dimensional coverage of quality and a holistic concern for the child’s needs.
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