

## Education Provision in Zimbabwe: The Return of the Ghost of Stratification and Its Implications to Quality and Access in Education.

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***Abstract:**At independence in 1980, the new majority government of Zimbabwe embarked on an ambitious but necessary programme to expand education provision as well as remove bottlenecks and other discriminatory practices which the colonial government had pursued. Issues of access and quality in education took centre stage as the new government sought to fulfil promises made during the protracted liberation struggle. In the first two decades of Zimbabwe's independence, significant strides were made in dealing with inequalities in the way schoolchildren at secondary school were treated. Resources were poured towards provision of education in previously disadvantaged communities under the new government's policy of education for all. However, with the economic challenges which Zimbabwe faced after the year 2000, stratification in education provision re-emerged in ways reminiscent of the discriminatory colonial era education system. As of now the majority of urban and rural day schools, resettlement or so called satellite schools, where the majority of Zimbabwean schoolchildren attend school, grapple with severe shortages of human and material resources and this has serious implications on access and quality in education. The paper contends that unless government intervenes to arrest the ever increasing gap in terms of educational quality and access between elite schools and ordinary secondary schools which cater for the majority of children, stratification in the provision of education will have telling consequences on national development in Zimbabwe. The research was carried out with a representative sample of five secondary schools from Masvingo district through analysis of documents, observations and interviews of critical stake holders in the schools.*

***Key terms:** Stratification, access, quality.*

### Introduction

In the provision of education, the discourse around quality and access to education is critical. This is so because the future of any country hinges on the nature of education its children get. Provision of education has also been a highly manipulated and contested area as political leaders seek to influence the future of the country in their favour through the maintenance of a firm stranglehold on education provision.

Education provision in Zimbabwe has been marked by challenges since the days of colonialism. Most scholars concur that through the education system, the colonial government managed to

ensure their continued grip on power through the provision of an education system which created less qualified and in some cases rootless Africans with a shameful sense of self hate. Whilst blacks received very little in terms of fiscal support from the colonial government, whites enjoyed unfettered access to well-funded schools and even sat examinations from internationally recognised examination boards. It would be interesting to note how the majority government has handled issues of access and quality from independence up to today.

This paper starts by examining educational access, quality and stratification as critical terms which need definition. A brief history of Zimbabwe's education system from the days of colonialism up to 2013 will be given. The research methodology will also be explained followed by the findings which will be discussed and conclusions drawn.

### **Quality education**

Bernard (1999) in UNICEF (2000:04) characterise quality education as education which equips children with relevant skills and helps them to create for themselves and others a safe, secure and constructive interaction between and amongst themselves. Quality education should satisfy children's "basic learning needs and enriches the lives of learners and their overall experience of living" (McCoshan and Otero, 2005:66). It is evident; therefore, that quality in education is not a spontaneous product of ideological decisions but an outcome of careful planning and resource mobilization towards education provision. Most countries deliberately create a false conception of quality erroneously convinced that well painted school buildings, large numbers of teachers and high statistical enrolment figures in schools are the marks of quality and yet quality education hinges even on elements like the nature of the curriculum, instructional technology, school management, professional expertise of teachers and support staff and the general motivation of teachers. Above all, quality education should cater for children's diverse potentialities and aspirations.

In Zimbabwe, the Nziramasanga Commission of inquiry into education and training of 1999 made the observation that there was a serious discord between the school curriculum and the needs of industry. As a result, even if students scored distinctions, it would never be a guarantee that industry would accept them.

An education's quality today is also measured against its global competitiveness. With globalization, countries of the world are closely interconnected. If an education is uniquely idiosyncratic without a global flavor, that education suffers from a dearth of quality. There is no doubt, therefore, that Information Communication Technology should anchor the curriculum.

Quality education as argued in this paper should also be a potent tool to fight poverty and any negative self perceptions of children. If an education cannot fight poverty through generation of improved solutions to problems, and through the application of skills acquired, that education is

deficient in quality. It is therefore an outcome of close consultation amongst critical stakeholders, namely, government, parents, children and industry.

### **Access to education**

The concept of educational access is viewed differently by scholars. Access according to Geith and Vignare (2008) is closely linked to availability of education. By having access to education, children have available educational facilities which they can make use of without any hindrances. This is where the debate is. Access in the end is largely relative. Jenjekwa (2013) argues that access should never be measured superficially using mere enrolment or participation in the educational activities provided but by the sum total of skills and knowledge acquired. Provision of access to education should be a systematic and concerted effort to eliminate barriers and obstacles to education (Geith and Vignare, 2008). In most cases governments give misleading conclusions when they refer to access merely in terms of enrolment for their selfish ends.

For the purposes of this paper, access is intricately linked to quality and one cannot talk of access without quality. Ultimately access should never be judged by superficial criteria such as mere availability of schools and teachers without considering “the nature of the knowledge being transferred by the schools attended, their overt and covert curriculum and the technology being used” (McCoshan and Otero, 2005:18).

### **Developments in Zimbabwe’s education system from colonialism to current time**

#### **Colonial education system**

In Zimbabwe, just like in many other African countries, the formal education system is largely a product of colonialism. Though missionaries had already established some education centres before the eventual occupation of Zimbabwe by settlers, a real national education system emerged after Zimbabwe’s colonisation in 1890. This education system was steeped and driven by racially inspired prejudices of white superiority and black inferiority. A precise depiction of this prejudice was captured by Kipling, a British poet in his poem “*The White Man’s Burden*” where he urges the white race to

Take up the White Man’s Burden-  
Send forth the best ye breed-  
Go send your sons to exile  
To serve your captives’ need...  
Your new-caught sullen peoples  
Half devil and half child  
(Kipling cited in Pu and Liu, 2012: 685).

This shows the extent of bias the whites had about Africans. As a result, missionaries were solely in charge of education for the so called natives before 1918. After 1918, the colonial

government then stepped in driven by the fear that missionaries could give 'wrong' education to Africans (Zvobgo, 1996). Colonial education at inception was solely meant to create a pool of minimally literate Africans who could carry out the White Man's instructions as well as serve as a desperate reservoir of cheap labour in settler homes, farms, mines and industries. If Africans were empowered by the education, it was inadvertent on the part of the colonial government (Rodney, 1981). Though missionaries were inspired by the gospel of equality, most of them found themselves compromised and treating Africans as second class beings.

Colonial education provision was marked by bottlenecks where the number of Africans who rose through the educational ladder got systematically diminished with upward progression. As a result, before Zimbabwe's independence in 1980 very few black children had access to the few schools available, worse still, the available schools were poorly funded and in most cases had unqualified teachers. Zvobgo (1996) also observes that the curriculum for Africans was different from that of whites. Curriculum design for Africans was specifically targeted at creating a class of self hating Africans with a deep seated inferiority complex. Meanwhile, education for whites was compulsory and the colonial government spent as much as twenty times more per white student than per black student (Kanyongo, 2005).

By the 1970s, three distinct strata of schools had emerged. Group A schools which were state schools situated in areas exclusively for whites. These schools were well funded and offered world class standards. The examining board was the Associated Examining Board (AEB) after about 4 to 5 years of secondary education. There is no doubt; the intention of such disparities in funding was meant to ensure that whites maintained a stranglehold on key positions in government and industry.

Africans attended Group B schools situated in high density residential suburbs for blacks. In terms of human and material provision, these were poorly funded in comparison with Group A schools and had teachers who had lower qualifications than those in Group A.

Group C was a broad category which comprised of Mission schools, private schools and government and council rural day schools. These schools received less funding from government and therefore operated through donations in the case of mission schools or through the meagre resources allocated by the government in the case of rural day schools. Private schools enrolled children from elite parents and the parents could afford the high fees demanded. African children sat for a Rhodesia Nation School certificate of Education (NCE) or could go to the F1 and F2 schools which catered for those who would have passed academic subjects at primary level and those who would have failed academic subjects respectively (Kanyongo, 2005).

Colonial education system therefore was clearly stratified with clear implications on quality and access. This stratification, a result of colonial policies of racially motivated segregation became

part of the motivation for Zimbabweans to engage in an armed conflict to bring about independence. The situation where European education catered for 100% of white children and yet the same government catered for just about 50% of African students leaving the other 50% as dropouts was just unacceptable.

### **Post independence education system**

Zvobgo (1996: 27) aptly notes that at independence, Zimbabwe “inherited from Rhodesia a racially structured system of education in which two parallel systems existed” one catering for whites and the other one for Africans. Educational reform was top on the agenda of the new government. The ideology of socialism which had inspired the brutal armed struggle insisted on the equality of all human beings regardless of race, colour or creed. Indeed the government had to make “drastic changes” to ‘destratify’ and remove racially and economically inspired stratification in education (Zvobgo, 1996:61).

The new government availed the most critical ingredient in education provision: financial resources. Areas previously neglected by the colonial government, especially rural areas received a financial boost. One other critical intervention towards destratification was the introduction of a uniform examination system which was run by the University of Cambridge. The new government’s thrust was to eventually localise the examinations. By 1984, steps to localise all examinations started with an act of parliament which enabled localisation work to start (Nembaware, 1994).

Thereafter, the process became gradual culminating in the formation of a local examination body. The Zimbabwe School Examinations Council (ZIMSEC) was established through an Act of Parliament in 1994 to run examinations in primary and secondary schools in Zimbabwe (Abraham, 2003). Ordinary Level was fully localised in 1996. In 2002, ZIMSEC finally completed localisation through the localisation of Advanced Level examinations (Musarurwa and Chimhenga, 2011).

Currently Zimbabwe’s education system is made up of pre-school education also known as Early Childhood Development (ECD) which caters for the 0-3 years, seven year primary school education which runs from grade 1 to7, and secondary education which runs for 6 years. This secondary education is however divided into two cycles, the Ordinary Level and Advanced Level cycles. The Ordinary Level cycle which is a 4-year circle culminating in the award of a Zimbabwe General Certificate of Education ( ZGCE) Ordinary Level certificate, covers a wide curriculum of arts, practical subjects and sciences and different schools offer different subjects depending on the availability of resources (Kanyongo, 2005). Mathematics, English, Science, Shona or Ndebele, Geography, and History are considered core subjects. A student should take a minimum of eight subjects at secondary level and should pass a minimum of 5 of these, including Mathematics and English Language, to be considered to have a full certificate.

Progression to Advanced Level is dependent on passes at Ordinary Level. Those with 5 Ordinary Levels can proceed to Advanced Level provided vacancies are available. Failure to proceed to Advanced Level means that the student would go to teacher's training college, technical college, agricultural college, polytechnic, or nursing training college if they have the requisite passes at Ordinary Level. If the certificate has less than 5 Ordinary Levels, students have a chance to supplement or to resign to fate and find informal employment or they simply stay at home.

It can be observed that expansion in terms of educational provision in Zimbabwe called for massive financial resources. Guided by the ideology of socialism, government poured in subsidies in education and primary education was free for all in the first ten years of independence. Reforms implemented by the majority government were "welfarist" in nature and gradually these commitments took their toll on the economy (Muzondidya in Raftopoulos and Mlambo, 2009: 169).

After ten years of independence, government was under pressure from international financiers like International Monetary Fund (IMF) to abandon socialism and adopt free market economy policies. In 1990, the government yielded to pressure and adopted the IMF prescribed Economic structural Adjustment Programme (ESAP) which was a cocktail of measures to try and get the economy back on track. This meant a drastic reduction in social spending and the effects were quite telling in education. The ghost of stratification gradually resurrected as challenges of access and quality in education manifested. As companies downsized and some closed shop, as competition from within and without rose, a significant number of parents lost jobs. Children's education was the first casualty and street children emerged in urban centres. Zimbabwe's economic downturn continued and was accelerated around 1997 when veterans of the war of liberation demanded gratuities and government paid them from unbudgeted funds (Hill, 2003). The entry of the country into the DRC war in 1998 exacerbated the situation and inflation continued to rise. The situation was aggravated by the government's forced takeover of white owned farms as a measure to correct historical injustices of colonialism. Farm workers lost jobs, and the economy shrunk further. Government was faced with competing priorities like the payment of civil servants salaries and the operations of critical ministries like Ministries of Health and Defence. There was free fall in education standards. Parents had to intervene with payment of teacher incentives as inflation eroded government paid salaries. Stratification reared its ugly head again.

Currently even though the economy appears to be on the mend with schools operational, the disparities which exist amongst the various categories of schools are worrying. Government has requested parents to continue paying teacher incentives because the salary government pays teachers is way below the poverty datum line. It has emerged that not all parents can afford the incentives as well as high fees to fund schools running costs and developmental projects.

### **Stratification in education**

Stratification is the existence of clear school divisions on the basis of critical aspects like infrastructure, finances and human resources. Ownership is also one critical determinant of stratification. There are bound to be different strata of schools where ownership is also different.

### **Research Design**

The research made use of the qualitative research paradigm in the form of a descriptive survey. Interviews, observations, and analysis of documents were made use of to get information on various aspects of education provision in the Zimbabwean schools sampled.

### **Sampling**

Sampling was done purposively and a representative sample of 5 types of secondary schools emerged. These schools for ethical reasons are referred to as A, B, C, D, and E

**A:** Private school (High fee paying)

**B:** Mission boarding school

**C:** Urban day school

**D:** Rural day school

**E:** Resettlement school.

Two government officials (one from district office and the other from provincial offices), Five School Development Committee (SDC) members, five school heads from sampled schools, ten teachers (two from each school randomly picked), two ordinary parents per each school (randomly picked) and six pupils per school (with gender balance) were interviewed from each school. Staff lists, enrolment figures, records of pass rates and asset inventories are among documents analysed. There was also a general observation of infrastructure of the concerned schools.

### **Findings**

The research established from the interviews, documents and observations, that there are clear distinct and discriminatory forms of stratification in Zimbabwe's education system.

#### **School A**

This is a private, high-fee paying school with the following attributes:

- i. This school is attended by children of mostly rich business people and company executives whose fees are paid by companies. The school insists that children should be driven to school (in respectable cars not old ones) at the beginning and end of term.
- ii. The school is well-equipped in terms of physical and material resources. There are adequate and well equipped classrooms, science and computer laboratories and practical subject rooms.
- iii. There is adequate support staff who performs ancillary duties like cleaning and pupils do not engage in any manual work.
- iv. The teacher pupil ratio is around 1 teacher per 20 pupils and the ratio is less than the government recommended 1 teacher per 30 pupils at Ordinary Level.

- v. The food is of high quality and well-prepared.
- vi. The school implements both the ZIMSEC and Cambridge curriculum because the school has a cosmopolitan focus. If the school had a choice, it would opt for international examinations only and leave ZIMSEC which is not prestigious. For both Cambridge and ZIMSEC examinations, the pass rate is around 50%.
- vii. The curriculum for both Cambridge and ZIMSEC use English as medium of instruction, a significant number of pupils have first language or near first language proficiency in English.
- viii. There is focus on elite sporting disciplines like hockey, cricket, rugby and swimming (formerly reserved for White only schools) with very little of popular sports like football. Competitions are mostly against fellow elite schools in and outside the borders of Zimbabwe.
- ix. From the school's mission statement and the head's vision, the school grooms company executives and professionals for various fields.
- x. There is 100% completion rate with no dropouts but transfers to other private schools.

### School B

This school belongs to the boarding category with the responsible authority being the church. The following findings were made on this type of school:

- i. The majority of parents whose children attend this school are government employees who struggle to raise the requisite fees which are however about 20% of fees paid by those in School A category. The Education Act of 1987 as amended in 2006, makes it mandatory for parents to determine fees together with the responsible authority. This has resulted in conflict in some cases when parents fail to agree with responsible authority on fees proposals.
- ii. There is modest physical infrastructure including specialised rooms like laboratories.
- iii. Academic staff is highly qualified and experienced and support staff is motivated through monthly cash incentives.
- iv. The teacher pupil ratio is around 1 teacher per 40 pupils as recommended by government.
- v. Pupil to textbook ratio is 1 textbook per pupil.
- vi. The curriculum is implemented fully (academic, science and practical subjects are offered). In terms of extra-curricular activities, soccer, netball, tennis, volleyball and basketball are offered. The so-called elite disciplines like cricket, hockey and squash are not offered because there are no qualified coaches and pupils and parents are not interested in them.
- vii. The pupils are equipped with Information Communication Technology (ICT) skills.
- viii. The school offers only ZIMSEC examinations and there is high pass rate of around 95%. This surpasses even the private high-fee paying schools. A very small number of students privately take Cambridge examinations.



- ix. Potential professionals in different fields are churned out. Most of these pupils advance to Advanced Level.
- x. Though the school fees is relatively low at around \$400 per term, the majority of parents, who happen to be civil servants from urban and rural areas, struggle to pay.
- xi. Selection to form one is through highly contested entrance tests.

### School C

This is an urban day school. The characteristics are as follows:

- i. There is very high enrolment which is not matched with the physical infrastructure. The school which is supposed to enrol 800 pupils has 2000 pupils. As a result, there is hot-sitting to accommodate the vast numbers.
- ii. The teacher pupil ratio is around 1teacher per 60 pupils.
- iii. There is shortage of text books; the ratio is 1textbook per 4 pupils.
- iv. The curriculum is offered in its broad nature.
- v. There is high achievement in popular sporting disciplines netball basketball, volleyball and football. The school does not offer disciplines like hockey, and swimming because there is no infrastructure and there is a general negative attitude towards them.
- vi. Teachers are lowly incentivised and are involved in parallel employment as private tutors elsewhere to augment their salaries.
- vii. The pass rate is low at around 40% at Ordinary Level.
- viii. There is a high number of dropouts from both girls and boys. Failure to raise fees is one major reason for both boy and girl dropouts. Girls also dropout due to marriage and the need to find menial employment such as being house maids while boys dropout to find informal employment as touts, rank marshals, bus conductors, informal money changers and gold-panners among others.

### School D

This is a rural day school. The school has the following qualities:

- i. There is shortage of physical structures and furniture. There are no specialised rooms like laboratories.
- ii. Most parents are peasant farmers.
- iii. There is no support staff to do cleaning of the school, pupils do the cleaning of toilets and maintenance of grounds.
- iv. The textbook pupil ratio is 1 textbook per pupil owing to United Nations Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF) intervention but there is no variety in the textbooks.
- v. There are no qualified teachers for critical subjects like Mathematics and Science.
- vi. The teachers are not given meaningful incentives (might be given \$20 per term which is not guaranteed).
- vii. There are no computers for use in teaching and learning.

- viii. There is only Agriculture and Fashion and Fabrics offered as practical subjects, the other subjects like Woodwork, Metalwork and Music are considered too expensive and beyond the capacity of this school.
- ix. In terms of co-curricular activities, there is soccer and netball.
- x. Most children walk long distances to school.
- xi. School graduates normally find informal employment because they would not have the compulsory subjects especially Mathematics and English Language.
- xii. There is high dropout rate among both boys and girls because of failure to raise requisite fees.
- xiii. Recruitment is non-selective, it is open to all who wish to enrol.

### **School E**

This is a resettlement school established in 2001 in farm previously owned by a white farmer. The farm was then compulsorily acquired by the government in 2000 for resettlement of landless black Zimbabweans. The school has numerous challenges outlined below:

- i. There are no proper classrooms, the school makes use of a disused farm house and some classes are conducted under trees and in pole and dagga structures.
- ii. There are no specialist rooms for particular subjects.
- iii. There is limited implementation of the national curriculum with focus on subjects which are relatively cheap to introduce for example, History, Shona, English, Geography, Religious Studies and Mathematics. There are no practical subjects on offer.
- iv. In the offered subjects, the pass rate is between 0% and 10%.
- v. From the records, Mathematics has recorded 0% for the past 2 years consecutively.
- vi. The teacher pupil ratio is 1teacher per 30 pupils.
- vii. Textbook ratio is 1textbook per pupil as a result of UNICEF donations. There is however no library to provide variety in reading materials.
- viii. Graduates of this school do not proceed to Advanced Level and are mostly employed as farm workers, bus conductors, house maids, shopkeepers and, in some cases, as police special constabulary operatives with no regular pay.
- ix. There is a high dropout rate as a result of frustration with school and general lack of school fees.
- x. In terms of co-curricular activities, the school offers mainly soccer though the school team plays without soccer attire.

### **Discussion of findings**

It can be observed that the education system in Zimbabwe seems segmented and stratified. Because of the government's weak financial position, it has been forced to play an observer's role. What is evidently clear is the fact that education provision in Zimbabwe is stratified. School A seems to be a resurrection of the colonial Group A category which catered for whites only. Racial discrimination has now been supplanted by economic segregation; with companies paying

the fees for their executives' children and making ordinary employees fail to send their children to such schools. Pupils at this school are groomed to take leadership of government departments companies and non-governmental organisations in and outside the country.

As for School B, access to this boarding school is restricted through the fees and through the selection processes where pupils are selected through an entrance test at form one. Access is seriously curtailed and yet this category remains a bastion of quality for many people with high pass rate in national examinations.

For School C, resources are a major constraint. While there is physical access, the teacher pupil ratios as well as strategies like hotsitting affect the quality of educational instruction. School C is however better than School D which is located in a rural area. This rural day school has challenges of material resources and shortage of qualified teachers. The school shows that there is more physical access and yet issues of access should be measured against quality.

The resettlement school, School E has the worst of situations. There is very little to talk about apart from enrolment. The school seems to be erecting "insurmountable barriers" (UNICEF, 2000) on the educational path of children who attend it. Pupils from such communities are destined for failure and will not realise their potentials as Zimbabwean children.

In order to deal with the discriminatory effects of stratification in the education system, the government can adopt the following recommendations:

- 1) There should be a clear resource allocation in the national budget for urban and rural day schools as well as resettlement schools for distribution as per need of each school. The more the school is disadvantaged, the more the school benefits – this would promote equity. This fund would take care of infrastructural development as well as staff incentives. The blanket rural allowance paid previously to teachers did not promote the very disadvantaged schools because it simply used one parameter – distance from the urban centre and it was a pittance.
- 2) It has been noted that one of the challenges of rural and resettlement schools lies in the calibre of the School Development Committee (SDC) members. The Education Act of 1987 puts the responsibility of developing schools in the hands of parents through such a committee. In communities where parents are poor and might not have received education themselves, it is very difficult to entrust such parents with the education of their children. A vicious circle of poverty is evident in these communities because of the unbalanced nature of education which does not equip children with relevant skills for survival. Perhaps government might second qualified educationists on to these SDCs to give guidance and advice.

- 3) The private sector could be encouraged to engage in various development projects in schools and in return the government can make some concessions on taxes for these individuals or companies.
- 4) Rural, urban and resettlement schools can be twinned with successful government and missionary boarding schools for exchange of ideas. This can deal with the negative effects of stratification on the perceptions of children about themselves and about their fellow brothers and sisters who attend different schools from them.
- 5) Government should insist on the implementation of the curriculum fully so that children are given equal opportunity to discover their talents. A limited curriculum simply limits access to education.
- 6) There is need for close monitoring of activities of elite schools so that these schools do not become obscene oasis of plenty in a desert of poverty.

## CONCLUSION

Provision of education in Zimbabwe is stratified. Even though it has been scientifically established that not all pupils are academically gifted, the curriculum is biased in favour of those children who are academically gifted. The arts and sport are treated as extra-curricular activities which are not given emphasis by secondary schools. Though the government has made pronouncements on equality of educational opportunities for all children, on the ground the situation is wistful. There is need for the government to intervene and ensure that what pupils receive as education in schools is standardised, otherwise education provision in Zimbabwe could be highly divisive and detrimental to national cohesion.

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