

COMMITMENT TO EDUCATION FOR ALL? A CASE STUDY OF LUSHOMO, AN URBAN COMMUNITY SCHOOL IN LUSAKA, ZAMBIA

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Abstract

Based on an under-resourced urban community school case study in Zambia,¹ this article explores how access to education can be extended and how efficient teaching and learning can effectively bridge the educational and economic imbalances at school level. The school's responses to economic inequality are investigated through an open system approach. The study discovered that as a result of inadequate funding the school has exemplified its efficacy by attempting to fulfil its maximum educational potential at the lowest possible cost. Costs were lowered by using multiple-grade classes, crowding classrooms, and employing untrained teachers. The study also found that the school's budget had an impact on teaching and learning. The Zambian Government's promised commitment to education of the poor and the realities in community schools did not coincide. The Government's promised support for teacher professional development and the placement of mentor teachers in community schools was also not implemented. The paper concludes that while the school managed to extend education at a lower cost, the quality of teaching and learning was, and remains, questionable and this has implications for school continuity and the value of the education being provided.

Keywords: Zambian Community Schools, Education Financing, Education For All (EFA), Alternative Education.

Introduction

Following the World Conference on Education for All (EFA) in 1990, Zambia, like many other countries and in response to the international call for action, pledged to secure quality primary EFA. It therefore attempted to align this global mandate to the local primary education sector's priorities by planning access, equity, and quality. However, due to a decrease in international aid and national domestic revenue, Zambia sought alternative options to cushion its budget deficit by advocating for greater use of existing services as a more feasible and sustainable way to expand access to and quality of education. Subsequently, Zambia adopted community schools as a cost-effective supplement to education provision. This article explores the problems affecting the implementation of the EFA project in Zambia. To this end, this case study on a Zambian urban community school critically assesses the access of learners to education, and whether the teaching and learning approaches can bridge the economic imbalances at school level.

Context

Since the World Conference on EFA, more than USD500 billion has been spent on EFA aid, with the bulk of it going to low-income countries (Lewis, 2020). Zambia, in particular, has benefited greatly from this assistance. However, in implementing universal primary education, it was found that the cost of the expansion and the quality of the gains were more than Zambia could spend and more than the international aid community could contribute. The ability to provide EFA, according to Viennet and Pont (2017), is contingent on the availability of sufficient funds for education. While school funding is important, so is the manner in which it is allocated, as these criteria influence where services are directed and where they will make the greatest difference. This brings the issue of the affordability of reaching universal primary enrolment to the fore, putting the role of external aid at the core of the process. In the same vein, Bray (2003) noted that as the financial and other limitations of government capacity gained wider recognition, advocacy of community participation became stronger. Therefore, after the 1990 commitment to implement universal primary education, the Zambian Ministry of Education undertook some administration restructuring that shifted from centralisation to marketisation of education. In the Zambian context, Rensshaw and Zipin (2013) claim that a neo-liberalisation policy creates inequality rather than quality by incapacitating the most vulnerable in schools.

Many policy changes, such as cost-sharing, have resulted from the economic crisis of the government's failing resources. While cost-sharing helps to keep the education sector viable, it has a detrimental impact on low-income families. In this regard, Mwalimu (2014) notes that the debate over state-guided versus market-led reform has had far-reaching repercussions for Zambia's education system. The cost of education has grown dramatically, making it harder for low-income parents to pay for their children's education. Zambia's education policy supports cost-sharing between the state, the beneficiaries, and other stakeholders through financial and in-kind contributions to education (MOE, 1996). However, the financial expense of schooling can limit demand in this sector, as disadvantaged families usually need children to participate in income-generating activities and household chores. Furthermore, with 45 per cent of its population below 18 years of age, Zambia is faced with mounting demand for more and better education. Therefore, additional resources are required if the country is to produce better quality and equality within the education sector (De la Fuente, Rosales, & Jellema, 2017).

As part of cost-sharing, governments across developing countries have had to implement institutional reforms and policy changes to save costs while expanding opportunities. As a result, most of these governments have adopted non-formal education to address the incapacity of formal education, to reach many children, and to facilitate progress toward the realisation of universal primary education. In Zambia, the government had to remain the principal provider of education. However, it needed to become more diverse, providing alternative paths for accessing education by strengthening community involvement and other partnerships with various stakeholders (MOE, 2002). This trend is reflected in the government initiative to recognise alternative and complementary education school systems as legal

educational entities. Decentralisation is not exclusive to Zambia but it is a global trend, advancing the role of communities in education in many developing countries (Carney & Bista, 2009). Carney and Bista (2009) argue that community participation in education is essential for policymakers and practitioners to achieve efficient, accountable, and sustainable education.

Community schools started as contemporary, non-formal, alternative education. They emerged as a result of neoliberalism politics, which included extensive economic liberalisation policies such as unrestricted free trade, privatisation, and fiscal austerity which involved cutting government spending and raising taxes. Community schools thus exemplify the inadequacy of formal schooling as far as accessibility and retention are concerned. The commitment to provide universal educational access by 2015 culminated in the legalisation of community schools in Zambia. Today, four types of school systems can be identified in Zambia: public (government owned, funded, and operated); private; grant aided (privately owned and operated, government funded); and community schools. While this local initiative of communities providing education is welcomed and encouraged by the Education Act of 2011 and the policy document on education (MOE, 1996), the Government has failed to provide adequate resources to enable these schools to carry out their functions.

Concerning non-state providers of education for hard-to-reach communities, Rose (2007) questions whether the state should assist them as they progressively merge with the traditional formal system. In the case of Zambia, the Government has taken up the challenge to, in part, fund registered community schools (MOE, 2011). However, Kalemba (2013) reports that the funding is insufficient and erratic. Consequently, donors provide the majority of the funding for community schools. This way, schools are expected to seek outside funding and resources (Kalemba, 2013). Reporting on donor support in Zambia, Frischkorn and Falconer-Stout (2016) observe that it is uneven across community schools, resulting in some schools being well-resourced but most not. As a result, there are concerns that, owing to funding constraints, compulsory primary education in low-resource schools is still a long way off from providing quality teaching and learning. In this regard, some critics argue that while community school initiatives appear desirable on the surface, a close examination of resources casts doubt on their viability. For example, Bray (2003) argues that in the provision of primary education, local communities are generally a camouflaged way to transfer the burden of financing education to the poor, and approaches have not included the allocation of adequate and appropriate resources to the communities to fulfil their function. Therefore, issues of long-term finance methods for schools seem to have been underestimated in a rush to adopt community schools as part of the formal education system. This suggests that Zambia has limited ability to sustain global rights to EFA due to limited resources. As a result, how urban community schools continue to extend access to primary education while also attempting to bridge economic inequalities in the schools, should be central to the debate on alternate approaches to attaining EFA.

Literature Review and Theoretical Underpinning of the Study

The paper is underpinned by open systems theory, an approach that communicates with its environment through its inputs and outputs that span systems boundaries (Meadows, 2008). An open system framework serves as a management tool that allows the analysis of all aspects of a school, including how its financial input is influenced both by the internal and external environment, which, in turn, affects the operation and performance of the school in relation to its commitment to EFA (Gupta & Gupta, 2013). We propose that by applying open systems theory, the way in which the financial state of the selected school produces rules governing human and school behaviour and its influence on the nature of the prevailing education practices will be revealed. Open systems theory aids in explaining the interrelationships and alignment between the various components and processes of learning in community primary schools. It allows for a better understanding of how schools structure themselves and function to achieve particular results (Cumming, 2013). Essentially, open systems theory allowed us to investigate the nature of education in schools from a broader perspective and gain insight into its interdisciplinary nature.

The promise of EFA is commendable. However, this global agreement seems to suggest that everyone would benefit equally from such a system. In essence, for developing countries with national budget deficits, looking at the projected cost of fulfilling this obligation might be a fallacy. Like many other developing countries, Zambia has struggled to provide adequate services to achieve EFA (Batley & Rose, 2011). The OECD (2017) has identified several methods to fund education and ensure where the resources are directed and what their effect will be. Others, such as Baker (2016), argue that increased education funding has no substantial influence on academic achievement but is necessary to ensure the quality of education provided, which suggests that spending cuts are likely to harm school outcomes.

Rolle and Houck (2004) have identified four foundation pillars of education finance: equity, efficiency, liberty, and adequacy. In line with this, several countries have implemented an equity-based approach to school finances to reduce budgetary deficits (Ladd & Fiske, 2012; Ladd & Goertz, 2014). Baker (2016) believes that while money alone may not be the solution to school finance problems or issues, more equitable and adequate financial inputs into education offer the essential underlying conditions for increasing equality and adequacy of results. Ladd (2008) identifies equity as both an input and an outcome. With equity as an input, Ladd (2008) implies the need for an equitable education finance system in which all schools receive an equal or equivalent educational package. Ladd (2008) views equality of outcomes as a distribution of an equitable education system in which all schools have sufficient resources to attain comparable educational achievements. In this situation, certain schools require more resources owing to their higher share of education difficulties. Because schools are likely to differ in terms of the sorts of learners they serve, any programme that equalises inputs would have to compensate for family background differences. The World Bank report (2015) shows that the actual disbursement of school grants for primary education in Zambia does not fully align with the budgetary allocation rules.

In light of limited public funds and the pursuit of equitable public school funding, the South African Government, for example, divides schools into five quintiles, with Quintile 1 being the poorest and Quintile 5 being the wealthiest (White and Van Dyk, 2019). However, all schools are given self-governing status and can charge fees (Raab, 2008). This is premised on the rationale that schools serving low-income communities should get more state funding than schools serving wealthy areas. Raab (2008) highlights issues with the implementation of the quintile grant system, such as the difficulty of collecting school fees from parents. Zambia, on the other hand, finances education on a sectoral rather than a budget-line basis, where grants to community schools are part of regular school financing (MOE, 2007). This allocation procedure requires the District Education Board Secretary's office to disburse 30 per cent of funding to community schools and 70 per cent to government schools (MOE, 2007). This policy, however, fails to provide an equitable distribution of resources because it fails to consider the number of community schools and government schools. This budget distribution suggests that community school funding varies according to the government's fiscal condition. This distribution technique relates to the percentage equalisation strategy indicated by Ladd and Goertz (2014). Its approach centres on ensuring equality and equitable access to educational financing. Political factors and state fiscal conditions are central to the primary school education funding provided by state governments. In Kenya, for example, the free education programme was reintroduced in 2002 as a dynamic political endeavour spurred by implementing free primary education and driven by a social contract between the nationally elected government and the electorate. A move based on an equity and socio-economic strategy aims to reduce inequity by balancing obstacles caused by limitations and direct schooling expenditures (Muyanga, Olwande, Mueni, & Wambugu, 2010).

Similarly, to reaffirm its commitment to achieving EFA goals, in 2002, the Zambian Government announced a free education policy at primary school level by committing to supporting all the schools in the country through funding of the Basic Education Sub-Sector Investment Programme (Mwanza & Silukuni, 2020). As a consequence, Mwanza and Silukuni (2020) found that free education in Kafue, Zambia, led to increased enrolment but also to challenges such as inadequate educational supplies, low staffing, and inadequate classrooms and desks. Thus, despite the intention to provide free primary education, the Zambian government later embraced a cost-sharing policy (MOE, 1996) owing to its financial burden. Compounding donors' inability to sustain interventions to implement universal education access (Omwami & Keller, 2010), more countries are turning to cost-sharing as a response to diminishing state funds. Boyle, Brock, Mace, and Sibbons (2002) define cost-sharing as "all officially sanctioned contributions by users to the financing and management of society made by individuals, households, or organisations". While cost-sharing can effectively sustain the education sector, it poses challenges to maintaining educational accessibility, particularly for children from disadvantaged backgrounds and underserved communities. The financial cost of education makes it difficult for poor parents to enrol their children in school as households may require children to work in income-generating activities or domestic household work.

Research Design and Methodology

The study has adopted an interpretative, qualitative case study research design founded on a philosophical standpoint that focuses on understanding human experiences through different viewpoints, interpretations, and underlying meanings from multiple realities (Andrade, 2009; Mertens 2005). Thus, to understand the selected school's commitment to EFA in the context of economic constraint, participants' subjective interpretations and perceptions of the world in this school's environment acted as a representative paradigm for the subject matter (Mack, 2010). The macro goal was to derive constructs from the fieldwork through an in-depth exploration of the nature of education provision in urban community schools. Although the original research involved multiple sites and a single set of cross-case findings (Yin, 2009), this article focuses on only one of the cases, that of the Lushomo community school in Lusaka. This case involved three teachers and the head teacher. The research is based on data collected through observations, document analysis, photographs, field notes, and interviews with a group of teachers and the school's head teacher. The data sets were independently analysed by means of thematic analysis and the respective findings were triangulated. The case study was selected because it allowed the understanding of experiences and processes in the broader socio-political context in which the policies were implemented and embedded in Zambia. Seidman (2006) influenced our reasoning for selecting the participants, arguing that social concepts are best understood through the experiences of the individuals whose work and lives serve as the basis for the abstractions. As a result, using purposive sampling, internal community school stakeholders were selected to discuss their experiences of education in the selected community school. This approach assisted in selecting participants who could provide rich descriptions of the phenomenon under study. Some argue that because purposive sampling requires the researcher to deliberately select the samples, it may jeopardise the validity of the findings (Morse, 2015). Thus, the emphasis was on depth rather than breadth.

Institutional Biography of Lushomo Community School

In this section, we present the findings regarding the Lushomo community school's commitment to and experiences of EFA. For ethical reasons, the pseudonym Lushomo, meaning "hope" in Tonga, is used to refer to the school. The findings are presented in the form of an institutional biography which tracks the school's history, its stakeholders, and factors that influence its mission and the individual choices and decisions of those people involved (Finch, Deephouse, O'Reilly, Falkenberg, & Strong 2017). The biography also explores how school behaviour was shaped and impacted by the macro social system (Clark, 2019), which helps to explain the context of the school and the motives that influenced its commitment to education provision in a low-resource context.

Lushomo is a community school that has been in existence since the mid-2000s. The school is a donor initiative responding to the high number of school dropouts in the area. It is situated in a neighbourhood whose demographics and socio-economic distribution are characterised by violence and crime, poverty, unemployment of

parents, poor resources, and a large population. Since the area is a high-risk one, the donor had to negotiate with the local leaders for permission to open the school there. As a result, the community welcomed the project and donated land to build the school, exemplifying community involvement in education. Through the donor's financial sponsorship, Lushomo school was built, providing free primary education and a feeding scheme. However, after the departure of the donor, Lushomo was taken over by a school committee that consisted of the original group that negotiated with the community to open the school. The school committee, in line with the government's mandate, had to elect a Parent Community School Committee before being registered (MOE, 2011).

Lushomo community school is mainly funded through government grants and school fees. The head teacher highlighted that the Government grant was often late and it was often difficult to get the money from the District Education Board Secretariat Office, which would be in arrears. The head teacher complained, "It's difficult for us to purchase instructional materials and renovate the school due to the government's erratic funding of community schools."

Owing to erratic finances, it was difficult for the school to maintain and improve the school property. For this reason, school fees were the primary source of school funding. The fees were essential for ongoing costs when other options were inaccessible. The school fees were a monthly K15 (Zambian Kwacha), the equivalent of USD1. Besides government grants, the Education Act of 2011 requires school committees to raise and administer school funds in community schools. The school committee at Lushomo was unable to raise funds for the school. In this regard, the head teacher commented, "Our school committee is supposed to fundraise for the school but fails to do so as it lacks ambition and fundraising abilities. Worsening the situation is the Government fails to offer the school committee training on fundraising."

The Lushomo Community School serves Grades 1 to 7. At the time of the study, It enrolled approximately 700 learners, most of whom were overage and came from low-income households. The school is housed in two blocks consisting of two offices and four classrooms for seven classes. As a result, this school operated on a bi-sessional schedule, with Grades 1 through 4 attending in the afternoon and Grades 5 through 7 attending in the morning. Structurally, two of the classrooms and the toilets had deteriorated and the classrooms were poorly ventilated, causing them to become hot. The school attributed overage learners drifting in and out of school to the opportunity cost of learning, and late enrolments as a result of poverty. When it came to students from low-income homes, teacher Bwalya emphasised the following, "The problem is that most of our learners come from impoverished families where they are overworked and come to school exhausted. Some even come to school hungry, making it difficult for them to concentrate in class."

Explaining the concentration of overage learners in the school, head teacher Mwamba pointed out: Some children reach the age of 13 without having attended school and are seeking admission to Grade 1. The Government cannot enrol such children due to their enrolment policy. As for us, we are willing to accept such

children regardless of their age. We give opportunities to everyone, thus having a high number of overage learners.

The school mostly used the admission process to accommodate children who had no access to the regular school system. Lushomo Community School relied on volunteer teachers, who lacked teacher training and had limited to no experience. The recruitment of untrained teachers to community schools is approved by the community schools' operational guidelines and the Education Act of 2011. The use of untrained teachers was due to the school's inability to attract and retain qualified teachers as a result of poor working conditions and remuneration. To curb the shortage of teachers, the school increased the class size. The school thus depended on untrained teachers with little experience due to the attrition rate of teachers. To cope with low salaries, the two teachers in the study engaged in other income-generating activities outside the school to compensate for their low pay. As teacher Bwalya noted,

We are there to work; it's just that our attention is divided between teaching and making ends meet. You expect to be paid at a certain time but discover that there is no money. As a result, we must find ways to earn money to support our families at home. Business ventures compete for our time as teachers, which affects our ability to concentrate on schoolwork. In all honesty, I don't always plan my lessons well due to time constraints. I only read for twenty minutes to prepare for class.

Teacher Bwalya had 12 years of teaching experience at the school. He had a certificate in early childhood education, which he obtained seven years into his practice. Teacher Bwalya taught Grade 6 and Grade 7 classes in the same classroom within the allocated timetable periods. On average, the classes had 68 and 50 learners, respectively. The grades sat together but engaged in their learning without being involved in the subjects taught in the other grade. The teacher took turns directly teaching each grade. Teacher Bwalya indicated that he had figured out how to deal with multigrade teaching on his own and did not receive any training or orientation.

As for teacher Ngoni, she only had two years of experience and no teacher education. She was responsible for the Grade 5 morning session and the Grade 4 afternoon class. Teacher Ngoni worked more than one shift as the Grade 4 and 5 classes she taught attended different sessions. By having a teacher work more than one shift, the school saved on recurrent costs as, instead of paying two teachers, the administrators compensated the teacher for extra work at a lower percentage rate. Head teacher Mwamba indicated, "Some teachers teach the morning and second sessions as we do not have enough teachers and classrooms to accommodate all the learners."

Data from interviews and observations showed that the school had overcrowded classrooms, which was caused by inadequate infrastructure and teachers. The head teacher indicated that this was due to the high demand for school places and the school not wanting to exclude any children for whom it was the only form of schooling they could afford and access. In the process, the school admitted more

learners than it could adequately accommodate. While overcrowding provided access to more children, the participants noted that it posed challenges for teaching and learning. With limited classroom space, it was difficult for teachers to interact with learners or move around to monitor their progress. The lack of individualised attention could be attributed to time constraints. Teacher Bwalya, for example, complained about how difficult it was to attend to the individual needs of her learners as a result of the limited space in the classroom that constrained mobility. Consequently, this influenced the teachers' instructional practices, forcing them to use whole-class instruction. For example, teacher Bwalya indicated the value of cooperative learning but did not use it due to space and noise-management constraints. Also, the use of alternative teaching approaches was restricted by the limited number of school teaching and learning resources.

Despite community schools following the national primary school curriculum, the school in this article had no access to the subject/grade level curriculum. Instead, the school premised its instruction on learners' textbooks. The implication is that while the new curriculum signified change, the teachers at Lushomo Community School might not have had a thorough understanding of the curriculum innovations. The participants highlighted the lack of teaching and learning materials that negatively affected learning. Textbooks, in particular, were in short supply with teacher Bwalya indicating that he only had a single textbook for each subject he taught. Thus, during English and Chinyanja reading sessions, the teacher would have a child read for the entire class. The teachers derived pleasure and satisfaction from their learners' end of Grade 7 results, a determinant of the quality of the school. The examination results affected their approach to teaching. For example, teacher Bwalya saw the Grade 7 examination results as a snapshot of her students' achievement.

The general observation of teaching in Lushomo community school was that the teachers' grounding in the subjects' content was inadequate. Both of the teachers in the study were self-assured and capable of teaching. Their self-efficacy was mainly grounded in the school's reputation for having high pass rates for the Grade 7 national examination. This focus reflected their teaching style, which emphasised going over past examination papers for class activities. Despite her high confidence in her teaching abilities, teacher Ngoni admitted to struggling with teaching technology and design, a subject added relatively recently to the school curriculum.

Community school guidelines recommend a learner-centred approach in schools (Ministry of Education, 2007). Although teachers at Lushomo community school claimed to use a learner-centred approach, the classroom observations revealed another view as classroom practices were dominated by lecturing methods. The head teacher reported multigrading as one of the practical barriers to the teaching and learning process in the school. One possible cause was the teacher's limited capacity to handle multiple grading assignments. Learning in school was characterised by whole-class teaching, mainly by teachers transmitting knowledge to the learners through conventional teaching methods in which they wrote notes on the board and explained them afterwards while the learners listened. Equally, worked examples also dominated most of the classroom practice. In this way, the teachers

acted as expert dispersers of knowledge. All decisions regarding the lesson process and evaluation of the learner's performance was centred on the teacher. The lessons also consisted of daily teacher-initiated, question-and-answer sessions spread throughout the lessons, especially during the introduction and conclusion. The majority of the questions frequently necessitated the provision of facts. The teachers' preferences for transmission-based instructional methods could be attributed to accountability pressure, as well as a lack of training. In addition, the emphasis on examinations stemmed from the teachers' premise that success in the national examinations was essential in determining the academic and career progression of the learners, while failure would lead to less income in the future.

Discussion

The discussion of the findings is organised into categories that reflect the purpose of the study and the open systems analytical framework selected. The findings are discussed in terms of the inputs, environment, and outputs of Lushomo community school.

Finances

While the 2011 Education Act requires the Zambian government to fund registered community schools, issues of frequency and consistency were prevalent at Lushomo community school. Consequently, the school transitioned to a low-fee paying school for the poor. The move greatly aided the school's sustainability, especially once the donor had withdrawn their support. The challenge, however, was setting fees that did not exclude the neediest children while retaining sufficient financial resources to ensure continuity. Bray (2003) has noted that school fees can potentially cause conflict since they undermine social order and the school's original intent. Equally, failure to raise more funds leaves the school with poor economics and little money to sustain it.

However, it is hoped that the market model will not take over and crowd out the non-market alternatives to schools as a result of poverty. Lushomo community school combines aspects of the market and informal education with aspects of public education. The challenge is that some parents send their children to a school that they cannot afford. Although it is illegal under the 2011 Education Act, the study found that children who did not pay the fees were chased out of school until they did. Consequently, learners fell behind in their studies. In this instance, maintaining pluralistic funding necessitates the maintenance of boundaries. Non-payment of school fees exacerbates school funding and quality issues by creating a self-perpetuating cycle as more parents fail to pay fees, funding falls, and teachers' salaries become lower because the salaries come from school fees. Equally, cuts in funding reduce the school's purchasing power for teaching and learning materials. Furthermore, when their pay is inconsistent, teachers can become demotivated and are more likely to leave the school, resulting in teacher shortages and decreased learning quality.

The budget for the initial establishment of the school was covered by the donor. By involving the local community leaders, the donor managed to bring in people with direct influence on development activities and broaden the mass appeal of the school service. This move is in line with Oakley (1995) who speaks of the benefit of self-reliance and community involvement in local development. According to Oakley (1995), community involvement in local development projects breaks people's mentality of dependence by empowering them to examine their problems and think positively about solutions. This community participation campaign was motivated by the need to distribute the educational system's resource burden while increasing the volume, relevance, and importance of education. Some critics of a community school initiative in education argue that although it seems desirable on the surface, a close analysis of the resources makes it questionable. Along the same lines, Rose (2007) questions if the state should support non-state providers of education to those populations that are hard to reach, as it is increasingly being seen to merge with the conventional formal system. However, similar to this study, Kalemba (2013) found that the government allocation of funding to community schools is irregular.

Untrained Teachers

The Kalemba findings show that the school's reliance on untrained teachers was influenced by a constrained school budget. Tanaka (2012), for example, discovered that, in Ghana, teachers' salaries put a strain on the government's ability to increase enrolment, creating a demand for the recruitment of untrained teachers. Similar to this study, Orodho, Waweru, Ndichu, and Nthinguri (2013) discovered in their study that 62 per cent of teachers worked outside the school to make ends meet.

Despite a range of perceived challenges, like lack of adequate teaching and learning resources, there was high teacher efficacy. This could be explained by the long-standing teaching experience of the head teacher and one of the teachers at Lushomo Community School, ranging from six to eleven years. It illustrates that teachers with long-standing empirical knowledge are more likely to persist in achieving teaching goals in the face of obstacles. Despite the lack of teacher education, local teachers in this paper had the advantage of being familiar with the experiences of their learners. This laid the foundation for teachers to use that knowledge to make learning more relevant, thereby engaging their learners to improve understanding. Mavuru and Ramnarian (2018), on the other hand, caution against prior knowledge that contradicts new content, as teachers tend to transform the meaning depending on their prior knowledge. According to Mavuru and Ramnarian (2018), learners can best conceptualise abstract concepts when teachers use examples that are familiar to the learners. The lack of access to the curriculum suggests that the teachers did not fully comprehend it.

The teachers, on the other hand, struggled to teach computer and technology studies because it was only recently added to the curriculum. This was compounded, according to them, by a shortage of resources to teach their subjects. The study therefore shows that teaching experience does not guarantee gains in content knowledge. Mavuru and Ramnarian (2018), on the other hand, contend that only professional learning can alter teachers' practices. One needs to note, however, that

the real success of professional development is when it increases teacher knowledge in ways that translate into enhanced learner achievement. According to the Operational Guidelines for Community Schools (Ministry of Education, 2007), the Ministry of Education is required to provide professional development courses for all untrained community school teachers in collaboration with other stakeholders. The study failed, however, to commit to its mandate of training untrained community school teachers.

Infrastructure

The overarching argument among the participants was that resources and infrastructure challenged learning. Asaaju (2012) attributes the quality of school buildings to the source of school funding. As a result, the school climate is related to the quality of the facilities which imparts student achievement (Uline & Tschannem-Moran, 2008). The classrooms at Lushomo were insufficient to accommodate the seven grades that the school hosted. As a result, the school had dual shifts of schooling – in the afternoon and in the morning. The school shifts shared the same facilities thereby encouraging efficient use of infrastructure and educational resources. However, as shown in the findings, the inadequacy of the infrastructure led to overcrowded classes.

Asodike and Onyeike (2016) have attributed large classrooms in developing countries to the global initiative for universal primary education, which results in increased school enrolment. They further argue that high population growth and increased understanding of the personal benefits of literacy exacerbate the issue. Although building additional classrooms can help reduce overcrowding, the rising need for community schools, along with insufficient school funding, makes this challenging (Rodriguez, 2017). Shirley (2017) supports this assertion, stating that overcrowding can be an expensive issue to resolve. Equally, the school code of conduct is seen as a viable strategy for dealing with overcrowding. Biyela (2019) argues that the school code of conduct helps teachers create rules to control and handle learner behaviour, which is a common issue in most overcrowded classrooms. Rules aid in the development of safe environments in schools and classrooms. Issues of discipline were, however, not a problem in this study. This was partly because the teachers were living in the same community as the learners, which helped them to know most of the learners' parents and they could collaborate with them. This assertion was echoed by Nadeem, Rana, Lone, Maqbool, Naz, and Akhtar (2011) who argue that teachers' limited dynamics make it difficult for them to lead large classes. This study asserts that while the school accommodated learners who exceeded the school's capacity, the teachers' lack of experience with large classes negatively affected the quality of teaching and learning. The classroom layout and teaching space limited the type of activities that teachers could give learners. This was more problematic as the teachers were not prepared to handle large classes (Rodriguez, 2017).

Regarding multigrade teaching, while it is considered a pedagogical option in certain countries (Buaraphan, Inrit, & Kochasila, 2018), it was implemented as a necessity at

Lushomo community school to overcome the teacher and classroom shortages. Multigrade teaching therefore became an alternative for expanding educational access. In the words of Mansoor (2011), multigrade teaching can play a critical role in the fulfilment of the EFA and Millennium Development goals, especially in areas where the alternative to multigrade schooling means no schooling at all. Furthermore, having two groups of learners use a single set of facilities may permit saving in capital investment (Buaraphan et al., 2018).

At Lushomo Community School, the mixed classes were expected to cover the curriculum as if they were monograde classes. Cornish, Linley, and Jensen (2006) caution that effective implementation of a multigrade approach extends beyond simply mixing learners of different grades. To that end, multigrade teachers require training and learning resources, without which they will find it hard to manage multigrade classes (Mansoor, 2011). However, Little (2004) contends that in many economically disadvantaged contexts, the fundamental educational concern is not whether a school is multigrade or monograde, but if a school exists at all.

Conclusion

Community schools are a good initiative that moves away from relying on external aid to fund education and instead seek to achieve educational efficiency at the lowest possible cost. The schools were ignited into official recognition by the call to provide EFA. It was thus a reaction to the demand for education for those who had been left out as a result of the shortcomings of the regular state education system. In the midst of formally recognising community schools, the issue of long-term sustainable funding was overlooked. This shows that although education policy was changed to align with the global call for EFA, it helped to increase access to educational opportunities, ignoring the fact that the funding component compromised the quality of education.

To increase access to education for vulnerable children who would otherwise not have access to school within a constrained budget, Lushomo Community School in Lusaka embarked on cost-cutting measures. These cost-cutting measures included overcrowding classrooms, having multiple-grade classes, as well as employing untrained teachers. If left unchecked, these cost-cutting measures may wreak havoc on educational quality and equity in the long run. The challenge is that cost-saving might go against the strategy of gaining greater efficiency in a school. We therefore conclude that strengthening professional development, human capacity in schools, and the timely release of government grants to community schools can improve quality and restore balance in supporting community schools. The school is committed to EFA by reaching groups not served by the public education system. The challenge, though, is to ensure that every learner has access to high-quality schooling. While the local community was involved in the initial planning of the school, they needed help from the government, political leaders, and other significant advocates to improve the quality of education provided.

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