

## Effects of Holiday Lessons and Financial Pressures on Low-Income Families and Households in Masvingo, Zimbabwe

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*In an effort to satisfy the Zimbabwe millennium development goals number one (1) and two (2), schools in Zimbabwe have resorted to engaging parents with school going children to contribute financially towards what has been called 'extra lessons' during the vacation period. This involves payment of tuition and teaching from the stipulated syllabi especially for examinable classes. Both low and high income groups participate in this venture. This study endeavoured to unveil the numerous effects of holiday lessons on families and households in Masvingo in Zimbabwe. The major purpose was to establish positive and negative effects this practice has on both the children and families involved in funding the lessons. The case study is hinged on Bronfenbrenner's ecological theory. Participants were drawn from Masvingo urban primary and secondary school children, their parents/ guardians and teachers. Data were collected through questionnaires administered to randomly selected school children and purposively selected teachers. Parents of children involved were also conveniently sampled and interviewed. It was established that the uncontrolled extra tuition fee rates charged by some teachers, had detrimental effects on breadwinners as far as coping with family budgets was concerned. The practice also affects the child morally, socially and psychologically where efforts to learn are hindered by the low poverty datum line in which they live. Teachers defended their positions saying lessons were beneficial to the learner. The study recommended a re-look into holiday lessons, by the Ministry of Education Sport, Arts and Culture officials/ supervisors where they could devise a way to assist every learner without any psychological harm on parents and their children. Extra teaching could be organised and be managed at school level at much more affordable rates all in an effort to enhance sustainability in education.*

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**Keywords:** holiday lessons, low-income, household, interdependence, economic hardships

### INTRODUCTION

Soon after the attainment of independence, the Zimbabwe Government embarked on scientific socialism ideology. This was a pro-people driven ideology which made education a fundamental right to all citizens. The result was a phenomenal increase in school enrolments, mushrooming of schools and bloomed teacher establishments. The government heavily invested in the provision of education on its citizens through payment of teacher's salaries and per capital grants (Chanakira, 1998). Teachers' salaries were above the Poverty Datum Line (Mac Garry, 1993). The developments yielded positive results because according to circular 14 of 2004, Zimbabwe had achieved the highest literacy percentage in the Southern Africa and in Africa as a whole. It held the second position to Tunisia. The underlining factor to the significant achievements was that, teachers were motivated by the remuneration.

A turn-back to satisfactory financing of education came when the government had a deficit on its budget account. Mac Garry (1993) says there was an argument that social services (education included) chewed the greater chunk of the 'national cake' yet they were non-productive. The financial imbalances experienced by government forced it to adopt the

International Monetary Fund's (IMF) inspired Economical Adjustment Programme (ESAP), which imposed some conditions which were not user-friendly (Nyagura, 1993). The ESAP advocated a cost-recovery plan to cut on government expenditure (Staff writer, 2011). The proposed 'Structural Adjustment' caused big changes in Zimbabwean government emphasis. The initial thrust of the educational 'growth' with equity turned to be growth in educational figures with equity no longer mentioned (Mac Garry, 1993).

The impacts of ESAP were re-introduction of primary school fees and increased secondary school fees. There was extra parental involvement in funding non-essential educational activities such as sports, grounds- cleaning and so forth (CADEC, 1995). Most injurious to quality of education was the cut-down (retrenchment) of teaching staff. Reduction of teacher numbers resulted in high teacher-pupil ratios in most schools. However, urban classes were overwhelmed by high enrolments, ranging from forty-five to fifty-five pupils per class. Larger classes are subject to teacher turn-out as well as low teacher moral. ESAP caused removal of government subsidies on basic food stuffs and lifting of price controls. This caused inflation which led to sharp increase in the cost of

living which left teachers grappling to survive. Teachers began to experience a declining purchasing power which left them struggling to do more with less income. Consequently, teachers' moral to do their work decreased. According to Mufanechiya and Mufanechiya (2011), when teachers are satisfied with their job, their confidence to make positive impact is enhanced. The sum total of ESAP impact has therefore seen quality of educational process compromised of low levels of teacher-pupil interaction, low levels of pupil participation and little of pupils' engagement in the learning process.

Teachers most likely adopted a mode of learning called 'seatwork' which positively works in the American context of education. According to Helmke and Schrader (1988) in concurrence with Jachyn, Allington and Broikou (1989), during seatwork pupils read or write tasks without immediate teacher supervision to enable the teacher ample time to concentrate on face-to-face instruction with small groups and individuals. Hence, Zimbabwean classes were characterised by children doing work on their own while teachers were either seated or concentrated on worthwhile private business usually colloquially described as 'chikorokoza' or 'black market'. Teachers were no longer concerned about pupils' understanding. Acknowledging the teachers negative mood, Tshuma (2011) affirms that the Zimbabwean education lost its lustre.

Due to difficult living conditions, some teachers left for 'greener-pastures'. On another hand teachers' strikes loomed and 'go-slow' became common practices. In 2008 the economic melt-down reached its peak (hyper-inflation) and there was total malfunctioning of the education system. Because education has been seen as a means of taking a child to a good future, parents who had money asked teachers to privately teach their children – (this was on willing parent- willing teacher). The practice increased as more and more parents took their children to renowned teachers until it became institutionalised by schools as holiday lessons meant for all pupils. The phenomenon was motivated by the schools desires to fund- raise as well as preparing pupils for examinations. On the other hand teachers applauded holiday lessons as a source of extra- pay and time to cover the syllabus.

The holiday lessons were met with mixed feelings by the corporate world. Tshuma (2011) posits that teachers are blamed for not adequately teaching during the term in order to facilitate paid extra lessons. The Herald Reporter (2011) also propounded the injustice exercised by teachers (to both the learners and the curriculum) during the term in a bid to exhort parents simply to cover up for their laziness. The report further noted that numerous complains have been raised by parents accusing

teachers of masterminding holiday lessons to line their pockets. The Policy makers seem to have decided to take a passive position about the problem.

### **THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

This study was centred greatly around the Ecological Systems Theory propounded by Bronfenbrenner (1977, 1979, and 1986) whose assumptions are based on interdependence between different organisms and their environment (Donald, Lazarus and Lolwana, 2010). The relationship between organisms and their environments are seen holistically. In a family, as in this study, every individual is vital to another in order to sustain the cycles between birth and death. And so, interlink between organisms or people within the entire system are largely dependent on one another. The theory sees different levels and groups of people as interactive systems where the functioning of the whole is dependent on the interactions between all parts. A school, as is the case in this study, is a system with different parts such as staff, parents, students, the curriculum and administration. Interdependence here even during extra teaching and learning is highly dependent on the activities of each member.

As educationists, therefore it becomes vital to understand how children's development is shaped by their social contexts (Bray Goosken, Khan, Moses and Seekings 2010; Semeroff and Fiese, 2000 and Dawes, Bray and Van Der Merwe, 2007). Bronfenbrenner explains fully how different level systems in the social context interact in child development. Interacting dimensions are central in his model covering personal factors (e.g. child's or parents temperament), process factors (forms of family interactions) contexts (families, schools or local communities) and time (changes over time in the child and the environment). He explains fully reciprocal influences in families, peer groups, classrooms, schools and local communities covering four rested systems, the microsystem, meso system, exosystem and macro system that all interact with the chronosystem.

And so, the idea of teaching and learning as extra curriculum is fully informed by this ecological systems theory in the sense that the child is in the centre of it all and the reciprocal interaction with her/his peers, school administration family and the external community all impact on the child, parents and their community. For instance, the notion of extra teaching can affect the exosystem e.g. fathers' work place, since this is where teachers' remuneration should be plucked from. Therefore, any frustrations from the work place can eventually affect the family, which in turn affects the child, her/his peers and eventually the whole macro system is affected in a way.

## **METHODOLOGY**

The study employed descriptive investigations within the qualitative research paradigm. Qualitative research helped to expose in-depth knowledge from parents or caregivers experiences, feelings and emotions in as far as an extra, but paid school curriculum was concerned (Frankel and Wallen 2000, Creswell 2008 and Leedy 2010). Twenty parents, whose children were involved in attending holiday lessons and five teachers who taught during the holidays were conveniently sampled. These were interviewed and were involved in focus group discussions where both researchers were also involved as participant observers. Participant observations helped the researchers to come to understand reality about positive and negative effects of holiday lessons on the parents and their children. The rich qualitative data were presented through narratives and vignettes.

## **FINDINGS**

Both primary and secondary schools offered holiday lessons to both examination and non-examination classes. In both cases, fees were charged for extra lessons. The holiday lessons were offered either at school or in teachers' homes. Teachers said the phenomenon was not new. They said that in the past holiday lessons were offered on rare occasions freely by teachers to help pupils who had problems mastering certain concepts. Data from interviews revealed that teachers were humiliated by the meagre salary the government paid them; hence they resorted to offering paid teaching services during school holidays as a way of augmenting their meagre salary. Reflecting on why they did not adopt the traditional holiday lesson practice, one teacher said, 'gone are the days' meaning they seemed not to tolerate any extra work without any payment.

Teachers also complained about heavy teaching loads that were not commensurate with their remuneration. They noted large classes which were above the teacher-pupil ratio. They cited among other things, unbearable marking loads and difficulties in offering individual help (one on one tuition). They attributed the problems to impinge on inadequate content coverage, hence the need to have holiday lessons. Justifying inability to cover content that should be covered during the term, one teacher said, "Ndoshanda zvinoenderana nemari yandinohora". (I work according to the money I am paid). Teachers said during holiday lessons, they teach topics/concepts they did not cover during school terms. This is a great disadvantage to children and parents who may not afford to pay extra tuition. Holiday classes held at schools comprised of bona-fide pupils of the respective schools (particularly boarding schools) and maybe a few from other schools. In the teachers' homes, pupils from all angles were accepted. In their homes, teachers could take more than one grade for

primary classes or more than one subject (for secondary pupils). It was found that teachers were eager to have large classes because they yielded more money.

Justifying the need for more money teachers said they wanted to keep pace with the developmental levels of other professionals. They wanted to buy cars, construct houses, and send their children to better schools to mention just a few. They also wanted decent meals and clothing. The impact therefore, like Bronfenbrenner (1997) inter related or ecological systems theory in Donald et al (2010) is that all the parts of the system may end up being affected by the move to carry out paid extra loads. The learner is affected negatively as he/she may not be afforded the opportunity by parents relying on a low income (Ganga, 2011). The whole community may even get to unresolved conflicts between teachers and parents if the fees are not paid. No one, even the government can control fees charged in each teachers home.

Teachers valued holiday lessons as an opportunity to prepare pupils for either June or November examinations. Indeed the Ministry of Education, Sports, Art and Culture more than any other Ministry, bears the greatest responsibility for the attainment of the nation's educational goals and the realisation of its vision (Muzawazi, 2006). He further says, through relevant and high quality, teachers can bring about prosperity and a high quality life for all. The phrase 'for all', denotes that teachers should consider all pupils in all their teaching sessions irrespective of their socio-economic backgrounds.

Parents are disillusioned by the concept of holiday lessons. The majority of the parents interviewed expressed being robbed of their hard-earned cash by the teachers. One parent mumbled that, '...maticha anoda kurohwa. Vanorovha basa vachimirira kuzodzidzisa pahoridhei. Vanoti mari yacho tinoiwanepi?' meaning 'Teachers want to be beaten up. They absent themselves from duty waiting to teach during holidays. Where do they think we get the money from?' They argued that, they were not against holiday lessons but insisted that they should be driven by the honest motive to assist pupils to fully prepare for their examinations. Parents from low income families cited severe difficulties to make ends meet. Narrating her ordeal, one woman said, 'I am a widow with six children, four of whom are in school. I live on vegetable vending to raise money for rent, food, clothing and the education of my children. There is no money on the market and I struggle to sustain my family.'

## **DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS**

The findings that holiday lessons were offered in both schools and teachers homes was an indication that the phenomenon was crafted to benefit teachers at the expense of the poor parents and their children. The

most ideal situation could have been to carry out lessons in schools so that standard control measures could be effected. After all, offering classes in private homes is breaching government policy as there is no conducive learning environment in the homes. In fact, there is a government policy with set standards concerning holiday lessons but this is not observed (Secretary's Minute Circular No. 9 of 2005). The Herald Reporter (2011) suggests that, holiday lessons be conducted under the inspection of education officials that should monitor unscrupulous teachers taking advantage of the facility to generate money.

Teacher's complaints about large classes during the term whilst they accept them during holiday lessons could be a somewhat clear indication of their love for money. It may also be questioned that, if they fail to give quality education during the term how could they afford it during the term. Such a scenario is likely to culminate to an internal efficiency of an education system which is determined by how well the learners in it progress from one class to the next and from one level to the next through successfully performing an examination (Mumbengegwi and Moyo, 1993). Instead, extra lessons should be offered with the external value of preparing learners for a productive life after they leave school. It is for the latter view that low income families and households who grapple with holiday lessons tuition fees intend to achieve. In fact, one of the Zimbabwean millennium goals is to eradicate extreme poverty and hunger, hence these low income families believe that through educating children, their families can get out of the poverty circle.

Findings on parents accusing teachers of being lazy and short changing them was denounced by teachers who took it as an imbalance between their work and the salaries awarded. In support of teachers, Muzawazi (2006:5) asserts that, "...motivation can remove problems such as laziness or poor work performances". In other words, what the teachers are trying to put across is that their salaries must be reviewed in good faith. Exorbitant fees demanded by teachers deny the disadvantaged children access and equity to education. Children who fail to pay for holiday lessons lose out on topics and concepts that are not covered during the term. Under such circumstances pupils may be at a disadvantage of being left behind in topics and concepts that were dealt with during holiday lessons as teachers do not repeat work they would have taught during holiday lessons. In an examination- driven system such as that of Zimbabwe, prosperity and better life are certain of passing either all and/or A' level examinations first. Therefore, what it implies is that failure to pay for extra- lessons may result in a cycle of poverty. Holiday lessons can be undermined for causing malnutritional problems to some families. Findings that some families cut down their meals in

order to save money to pay teachers infringe the Recommended Dietary Allowances (RDAs) especially for growing children (Ward Law and Smith, 2011). Poor families are naturally disadvantaged in many facets of life (Chinyoka and Ganga, 2010). Their plight is worsened as they are forced to distribute the little funds they may have. Food is a basic need that should be by no means be compromised (Maslow in Santrock, 2006).

Holiday lessons also deny pupils time to travel to their rural homes and other places to visit relatives and kinsfolk. Durkaim in Haralambos and Holborn (2008) points that, when children interact, they get the opportunity to internalise and to identify with their culture. Furthermore, holidays were designed to allow pupils time to refresh and reflect on previously learnt concepts without pressure. Holiday lessons unfortunately expose pupils to the same routine throughout the year. Teachers need to realise the essence of the saying that goes 'Too much of a thing becomes monotonous'. Indeed, to some learners the monotony of being in school may always eventually have negative impacts in their commitment to schoolwork.

## CONCLUSIONS

Based on the above findings, the following conclusions are debated:

- Circumstances in homes, such as low socio-economic status are leading teaching staff in both primary and secondary schools to offer paid teaching services. The quality of the teaching services provided does not seem to matter to them for as long as their present salaries are augmented.
- There is no control over the fees charged within the homes by each teacher. Parents and their children may suffer without complaining because all that they need is to allow their child to self- actualise or get to the peak of his /her own life goals.
- There is unequal opportunity for children in the communities since only those who can afford to make cash sacrifices are permitting their children to join extra teaching. This may lead to a situation where the populace may not be able to achieve millennium goal number 1, which specifies that every child should be afforded universal primary education opportunity. Some families fail to meet their basic needs and cases of under nourishment as mentioned by participants may eventually lead to poor health and disease in the community.
- Learners' failure to get rest during the vacation may eventually lead to the lack of interest in school activities. Children can be demotivated especially where teachers do not plan adequately to convince learners that extra lessons are a worthwhile exercise.
- The practice may not help to fulfil all children's rights as mentioned in the convention of children's rights where Zimbabwe is a signatory.

Infact, the practice could be abusive if not properly handled. Children who are not afforded the chance live in anxious, stressful and difficult life circumstances (Ganga and Chinyoka, 2010).

### RECOMMENDATIONS

The following are recommendations that may enhance the extra teaching practice:

- Teachers should help reduce anxiety and stress in children by following and completing a scheduled school syllabus during term time instead of using inadequate coverage of the syllabus to lure pupils into extra money making teachings.
- Government policy should be much clearer on the issue of extra lessons. Who should charge, where and when should these be carried out?
- Proper planning of these lessons by the Ministry of Education should be done in order to afford all children an equal opportunity to education.
- If properly scheduled, there has to be a stipulated amount of tuition that can be afforded by all learners.
- Schools in collaboration with teachers and the school development association should be responsible for charging affordable holiday fees.
- A replication of this study could be ideal in other cities and rural sections of the country in order to get perceptions of various stakeholders on this issue.

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