

Factors Which Influence Pupil Performance in Zambia: A Case Study of Kamwala Ward in Lusaka

David Kaluba

Information and Communications University, School of Humanities, Lusaka, Zambia

Abstract: The Zambian education system has evolved over the years since independence. Zambia inherited its education system from Britain and has continued mostly in the same line of the British education system. The Zambian government has been working hard to improve on the education system and the education standards of its citizens.

The performance of pupils is of great importance to the government as well as the general citizenry. The government has been doing everything possible to improve on the performance of pupils at both public and private schools. Though there are measures being implemented and policies being developed to improve on the performance of pupils, it seems the improvement is not happening at the desired rate.

This research was conducted to investigate the factors that influence the performance of pupils in Zambia. The researcher used a combination of qualitative and quantitative methods to purposively and randomly issue research questionnaires to fifty respondents of which forty (40) were teachers and ten (10) were learners. The research involved public, private and community schools.

The study revealed a number of factors that have contributed to pupil performance and among them are teaching materials, government policy and learning environment to mention just a few. In most schools, teachers as well as learners face a lot of challenges that if adequately attended to will see a rise in the performance of pupils both in the public and private schools. Though, the research shows that poor performance is more tilted towards public schools, it can be noted that any improvement done on public schools will surely have a strong bearing on private schools.

This study provides the necessary foundation for future researches that can be carried particularly in finding solutions to the challenges that negatively influence pupil performance and provide the necessary remedies to such challenges.

The research results pointed to the fact that a lot still needs to be done in improving the performance of pupils particularly in public schools. The provision of basic education requirements is a necessity such as a good learning environment.

Keywords: Government policy, Learning Environment, Pupils, Pupil Performance, Teachers.

1. INTRODUCTION

The Zambia education system has been growing significantly over the years. It is a known fact that during its initial stage, the education system was more voluntary with a lot of missionaries helping in establishing schools and educating the people of Zambia. The works of the missionaries highly complimented government efforts and it has become evident that

most of the missionary run schools are doing well especially with the academic performance of the pupils. The Catholics, the United Church of Zambia, the Salvation Army and others are some of the church institutions who up to date have run some of the best schools such as Ibenga Girls Secondary School, Fatima Girls Secondary and Chikankata Secondary School to mention just a few. It is said that the origin of Zambia's formal education system started with volunteers especially the Christian missionaries.

It is undeniable that most missionary schools have been performing well as compared to the public or government schools. The ministry of education reports (MOE 2003) that slightly over 65% of the pupils in catholic and other private run institutions received certificates at grade twelve which was not the case for public schools. Most parents would prefer their children in private schools as compared to government schools when it comes to academic performance. There are some clear discrepancies in as far as pupil performance is concerned between public and private schools.

The performance of grade twelve pupils weighs heavily against government schools as compared to private schools and other missionary supported schools. Dr John Phiri then as Minister of Education was reported to have noticed the trend where government schools were underperforming as compared to the private and mission schools (Post Newspaper date 9th May, 2012)

1.1. Factors influencing Pupil performance:

There are research works that have looked at pupil performance and these have highlighted some of the significant factors that influence pupil performance. Mitter (1991) reported that in Africa the greatest contributor to poor performance is that African governments change curriculums without preparing the learners. This is said to be a contributor to poor pupil performance as there is no time and consideration given to the learners to adjust. A study by Mbozi (Mbozi 2008:127) in Kazungula district found that it is the limited text books that contribute to poor performance. The report by Mbozi had similar outcomes with the research works that were done in both Uganda and Ghana where it was concluded that the availability of textbooks is the cheapest way of improving pupil performance. However, in the Zambian scenario it is not true that increasing textbooks will automatically translate into pupil performance. On the contrary, it has been concluded that a thorough training of teachers combined with an effective use of the textbooks can instead improve pupil performance (Kelly and Kanyika 2008).

The availability of textbooks in some cases actually meant that the teacher reduced on his performance. This made the researchers to conclude that "Pupil learning will not occur merely by distributing books to pupils. Teachers must also learn how to incorporate these additional resources (textbooks) in their teaching strategies in such a way that they do not abdicate their teaching functions to the 'the book' but actively seek to enable pupils to understand the contexts of the book and how to derive maximum profit from it" (Kelly and Kanyika 2000, Kasanda 2003).

The other factors that have been noted as contributing to pupil performance include absenteeism. Both the absenteeism of pupils and teachers was noted to greatly contribute. The National Assessment survey (Kasanda 2003) revealed that staff and pupil absenteeism, late coming and early knock off had a negative impact on pupil performance.

The Ndoye report (2007) attributed pupil performance as being affected by over enrolment. It states that over enrolment has contributed to high teacher-pupil ratio which has an adverse effect on performance. It is certain that the number of pupils a teacher is able to teach adequately has a bearing on their performance. The issue of over enrolling needs to be addressed urgently. The need for government and the private sector to provide enough and affordable space for new entrants is important and requires immediate attention. There is need to reduce teacher-pupil ratio to manageable levels. This can easily be done through the development of new learning facilities or schools.

1.2. Statement of the Problem:

The performance of pupils in any given country is very important both for the government and the parents of the pupils. The government of the Republic of Zambia had noticed in the Ministry of education report (MOE 2003) that private schools seems to be doing better in performance as compared to public schools. This research was conducted to find out some of the factors that influence the performance of pupils in schools. The government has been doing everything possible to improve on the performance of pupils at both public and private schools. Though there are measures being implemented and policies being developed to improve on the performance of pupils, it seems the improvement is not happening at the desired rate.

2. METHODOLOGY

The research was a qualitative method with a combination of some quantitative methods that was conducted in the Lusaka Province, Kabwata constituency and in particular Kamwala ward. There were fifty (50) respondents of which forty (40) of these were teachers and ten (10) of them pupils. The data was collected using a hard copy questionnaire that was distributed to teachers and pupils using both a simple and purposive sampling procedures.

Qualitative data was analysed using a content analysis method while quantitative data was analysed using rhesaforms, excel and stata software.

3. RESULTS

Zambia now boasts over three sectors from which education is being provided and these are the public schools, the private and the community schools. Most of the places have public schools which are represented by about 33.33%. There are other places which have all the schools of public, private and community with representation of 29.63 per cent. This number is followed by the other places that only have public and private schools at 25.93 per cent. The remaining has either a private school alone or the public and community schools only and this comes together with the unknown at 3.70 per cent. Generally speaking, there is at least a school in most of the parts as per the response from the respondents.

It was noted by the respondents that of the stated schools, it is the private schools that are doing well in terms of pupil performance. A representation of 70.37 per cent indicated that the private schools are performing well as compared to 25.93% who went for the public schools. The research results showed that the pass rate in most private schools is above seventy-five percent (75%) as compared to public and community schools which boast of over fifty (50) and less than fifty percent respectively.

The study results showed that the teacher to pupil ratio is high in the public schools as compared to the private schools. In most cases, a teacher in a public school had a minimum of over fifty (50) pupils in a given a class. As compared to the private schools, most of the respondents indicated that the teacher to pupil is lower than fifty (50).

It was the respondents' view that most of the learners do not have learning materials in public schools and community schools which was not the same as private schools were the respondents said the learners do have learning materials. The teachers in both the public and private schools are noted by most respondents that they do have teaching materials whereas that is not the same with community schools.

The pass rate was recorded high for private schools were the respondents gave the highest percentage to rank between seventy five (75) and hundred (100) per cent. This is followed by public schools while the community schools were at the bottom.

Though most respondents stated that they would love to see some changes to the teaching materials, the highest number of the respondents accepted that the teaching materials are still good.

The government has been seen by the respondents as being committed to be doing something about improving the performance of pupils. There are policies in place helping to improve pupils' performance as per most of the respondents. It is noted by the respondents that the teachers have the capacity to implement government policies. There are also activities that have been noted to be taking place at most of the schools and these are aimed at improving the performance of the pupils at these schools. Among the noted activities are the introduction of academic awards, building of wall fences to safe guard the learning environment, procurement of learning materials, discussions among parents, incentives for tutors, education tours and the addition of learning blocks.

3.1. Challenges:

The research revealed a number of challenges that have been associated with pupil performance. The respondents reported a number of challenges that the schools face and in particular the public schools. The challenges that have been noted include lack of library facilities, very low discipline levels, high shortage of trained teachers, insufficient classrooms, no sports facilities and the lack of teaching aides. The prominent among them is the issue of library. Most of the public schools do not have libraries that pupils can use to study during their free times or weekends. The other thing that was singled out among the challenges also prominent on the list was the issue of the high rate of late coming to school. This affects mostly pupils as it was noted that most of the learners walk to get to school.

The respondents also indicated the challenge of teaching in local languages. This challenge is accompanied by a number of issues that are faced by both teachers and learners. The local language teaching has come with challenges such as Teachers struggling to find the right words in local languages, lack of text books in local language, there no materials to study in local languages, lack of reading culture, low performance rate especially in reading, transferred pupils from other regions where a different language was used are struggling in the new places and the same applies to teachers, translations of some words from English to local language is proving a difficult task, lack of understanding of the local language, lack of training in grammatical and sentence constructions in local languages, difficulties in explaining other subjects such as mathematics in local languages and hence forth most are not able to teach effectively and efficiently.

4. DISCUSSIONS

The discussions of the findings were done in the light of the following research objectives;

1. To establish the influence of the learning environment on pupil performance.
2. To ascertain the effect of the teacher and the teaching material's contribution to pupil performance.
3. To establish the role of government in influencing performance

The purpose of this study or research was to investigate factors that influence pupil performance in schools. In line with the objectives of this research, it should be noted that the study underlined the fact that most well performing schools are the private ones, followed by the public schools while coming in distant third are the community schools.

4.1. To establish the influence of the learning environment on pupil performance:

The learning environment is of great importance when it comes to pupil performance. This environment is first seen to be created through the teacher –pupil ratio. It is clear from the study that there are a high number of pupils for a teacher in government schools as compared to private schools and community schools. The research indicates that 60.88% of the pupil-teacher ratio is above 50 for a teacher in public schools. The number of pupils per teacher has adverse consequence in terms of monitoring and checking the assignments. This indicates that the environment may not be conducive to conduct an effective class. It is highly possible that in such classes, there is a lot of absenteeism and noise. This gives a tough time both for the learner and the teacher in terms of receiving instructions as well as in terms of dispensing instructions. It is possible that the learning environment that is created in the public schools is not favorable. This can have a major impact on the performance of learners in a given exam or test. The public schools are not providing a healthy learning environment to the learners.

The research also shows that most schools do not have adequate learning classroom blocks. This implies that there is a scramble for the little space that is available. The lack of enough classroom blocks also implies that the school does not have the capacity to take in more learners from the surrounding communities. This could be the cause for the over enrolment rate which contributes to a poor learning environment. A favourable learning environment is essential for good performance and this type of environment is usually provided by most of the private schools. The private schools do not normally have overcrowded classrooms. As seen from the research, most of the teachers indicated that the teacher to pupil ratio is unhealthy.

4.2. To ascertain the effect of the teacher and the teaching material's contribution to pupil performance:

The research results indicated that most of the private schools do have materials both for teachers and learners a tale which is not the same for public and community schools. It is also noted from the responses that in most public schools the teachers are equipped with teaching materials. Of all the respondents, 79.17% indicated that the teachers in public schools have the teaching materials while 90.30% indicated the same for private schools. It can be said from these responses that the teaching materials play some role in improving pupil performance provided that they are used effectively and correctly.

It can be taken for granted from this representation of facts that both the private and public have a minimum number of materials to deliver as compared to the community schools. The study is consistent with other studies that have implied that the need for teacher materials is essential for a pupil to perform well. The Casetetter study (1981) indicated that adequate teaching materials are essential for an effective school. The study of Mbozi (2008:127) noted that it is the limitation on the availability of text books that contributed to poor performance. This is substantiated by the

overwhelming response that there is need for libraries in schools. There is therefore the need to ensure that teachers have sufficient teaching materials in order for them to deliver effectively.

4.3. To establish the role of government in influencing performance:

The government was noted in this study as having being actively involved in improving the performance of pupils. The number of 76.19% respondents indicated that fact. The government is doing this effectively through policy development and also have on the ground government have enough teachers that are able to implement the education policies. The government is also in the business of improving education by taking certain measures to build on the existing institutions as well develop the existing ones by expanding on the number of classroom blocks. This indicates that the better the environment, the higher the possibility of improved pupil performance. The government is also seen to work on the pupil performance by encouraging teachers to improve on their qualifications. A lot of teachers over the last few years have been seen to get back to school in order to upgrade on their professional qualifications. The government has also emphasized the fact that the private schools should at all time engage trained teachers. This is followed up through constant supervisory mechanisms to ensure that private schools are adhering to this policy direction.

In an effort to improve on pupil performance, the government introduced the teaching of subjects in local languages. Although the issue of local language introduction has not been seen as a major factor in improving pupil performance, it has been noted as a positive development in helping the improvement of pupil performance. It is expected that with this development, a number of pupils will begin to grasp the concepts of subjects at a tender age in languages they easily understand and speak.

The literacy level of the learners is not impressive as most of them are only fairly able to read and write. A good number have been said to be good in both receiving instructions and ability to speak. Literacy level indicates the development that education has done on an individual and it has a great bearing on the performance level of pupils. Pupils that are not able to read and write cannot be expected to perform well. This has an impact on pupil performance. It is therefore important that the literacy levels are improved for the schools to begin to see a great improvement in the pupil performance.

5. CONCLUSION

The first objective was to establish the influence of the learning environment on pupil performance. It was found in this study that the private schools performed better than the public and community schools. The study shows that the learning environment is essential for a favourable pupil performance. It contributes highly to how pupils perform. It is therefore essential that the government and other stakeholders in the sector create environments that will have a positive impact on the performance of pupils. The number of pupils in private schools is lower in a class as compared to public schools. It can be concluded that the learning environment to some extent has an effect on the pupil performance. It is easy for a teacher to effectively teach a small number of learners than a large number.

The second objective was to ascertain the effect of the teacher and the teaching material's contribution to pupil performance. It was noted that the both teachers in public and private schools have teaching materials. However, the same is not true for the learners as those in public and community schools have been said to lack textbooks as compared to their colleagues in private schools. The teacher is an essential instrument in boosting the performance of pupils. A poor performing teacher cannot be helpful in improving the performance of pupils. It is vital that the government continues to encourage the improvement of teachers professionally and otherwise in order to keep upgrading the standards of the public schools. This certainly has to be coupled with the improvement on the teaching materials. The up to date materials are essential and the government should device policies that will effectively promote the use of materials both by learners and teachers. Contributions to a better performance could be attributed to the availability of materials for learners and teachers as well.

The last objective was to establish the role of government in influencing performance. It has been noted that the government is involved in doing everything possible to improve the standard of education and improve pupil performance. The government is the key player if the performance of pupils has to improve. The government take several routes to ensure that this comes to pass and this is happening through;

1. Policy development
2. Academic interventions

The study also provided the following recommendations if the performance of pupils has to improve;

1. The possible increase of the learning and teaching materials for both learners and teachers.
2. The possibility of building public/community libraries
3. The possibility of reducing the teacher to pupil ratio in public schools
4. The possibility of improving on the school curriculum to be update with current trends
5. The possibility of improving on the incentives for teachers and learners
6. The possibility of the continuous improvement of infrastructure and learning environments
7. The continuous development of teachers

This study provides the necessary foundation for future research that can be carried out particularly in finding solutions to the challenges that negatively influence pupil performance and provide the necessary remedies to such challenges. Education is cardinal and finding ways and means to improve pupil performance is of paramount importance.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

I would to pay my gratitude to the management, staff and lecturers at ICU in particular those that have been involved in taking me through the program directly or indirectly.

I am in particular, highly indebted to the services of Mr Marvin Kabubi for his commitment to guide me through this tedious process. I salute you Sir for all your timely responses and advice.

Many thanks to as many as they maybe too numerous to mention who supported me morally and in hospitality such as my own Sister Mwewa Chibuye, brother Bishop Anthony Kaluba and wife Sharon, Gladys Tsikang, Mrs Christine Tembo and Husband and Mum Rose Chunda.

I salute my wife Kenanao Kaluba and my daughter Musambazi for giving me space to put this work together. Finally and most importantly, my Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ for the grace to complete the program.

REFERENCES

- [1] Scott W.V., Johns ton D.D., (2009), *Research Methodology for everyday Life*, John Wiley & Sons, California, USA
- [2] Mathukuthy M.M., Badrinaraya S.P., (2010), *Academic Writing*, SAGE, USA
- [3] Martin Kay, *Research Methodologies in Social Sciences*.
- [4] Mwanakatwe M.J., (1974), *The growth of education in Zambia since independence*, OUP, Zambia
- [5] Bwalya L.E.S., (2012), *The Provision of Universal Access to Basic Education in Zambia*, UNZA, Lusaka, Zambia
- [6] Bulfin M., (2012), *Zambia's education system in historical context*, A Spark Ventures publication,
- [7] Malamfu J., (1998), *Empirical Evaluation of financing University Education in Zambia*, CBU, Kitwe, Zambia
- [8] Malambo B., (2012), *Factors affecting pupil performance in Grant aided and non-grant aided schools*,
- [9] Chali R., (2015), *Zambia's education system – 44 years after independence*, Lusaka, Zambia
- [10] Ministry Of Education Report, (2003), Lusaka, Zambia
- [11] Malambo B., (2012) *Factors Affecting Pupil Performance in Grant aided and Non-Grant Aided Secondary Schools: A Case Of Selected Secondary Schools In The Western Province Of Zambia*. UNZA
- [12] Mbozi, E.M. (2008). *Classroom Factors That Affect the Quality of Education In Selected Basic Schools In Livingstone And Kazungula Districts In Southern Province Of Zambia: A Doctorate Dissertation*. Lusaka: University Of Zambia.
- [13] Mitter W., (1991). *Teacher Education in Europe: Problems Challenges and Perspectives*
- [14] Ndoye, M. (2007). *Africa: Building the Foundation for Sustainable Development*, Hep Newsletter Xxv (3), July-September, Pp 3. 13