

Factors contributing to ineffective teaching and learning in primary schools: Why are schools in decadence?

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Abstract

The study sought to explore factors that contribute towards effective teaching and learning in primary schools. The study was prompted by high failure rate of pupils at grade seven level which recorded zero percent pass rate since 2013. The researchers were prompted to investigate why there is such decay in schools in Zimbabwe. Mixed methods were used to collect data. The study found out that teachers do not employ a variety of teaching methods They do not prepare a variety of media for use in the teaching and learning. Teachers' instructional materials are limited to textbooks and syllabuses and do not go beyond that. Pupils learn in harsh and uncondusive teaching and learning environments and there is low morale among teachers. Parental support in terms of extra materials such as text books and revision books is very low. Only a small proportion of parents guide their children on homework. They do not provide extra lessons for their children. Schools lack adequate textbooks, revision books and resource books to extend children's knowledge. The study recommends the need for schools to employ qualified teachers who have knowledge of effective teaching. School heads should supervise teachers so that proper teaching, scheming and planning is done. Donor funding should be sought to provide necessary resources like text books that are in short supply. The Ministry of Education should supervise school practices to align them with the demands of children in the twenty first century.

Key words: teaching, learning, effective teaching and learning, pedagogical practices, didactics

1. Background

Effective teaching in primary schools is a major concern in many countries of the world. For effective teaching to take place, we need torch lighters (Lacina & Block, 2011), teachers who distinguish themselves and set themselves apart from the rest. It is argued that effective teaching also takes place where there is reflective practice (Nolan and Hoover, 2008; Delvin, Kift & Nelson, 2012). Reflective practices are considered as the brick and motor for effective teaching and literature has this to say:

Without routinely engaging in reflective practice, it is unlikely that we will be able to understand the effects of our motivations, prejudices, and aspirations upon the ways in which we create, manage, receive, sift, and evaluate knowledge; and as importantly, the ways in which we are influencing the lives, directions, and achievements of those whom we nurture and teach (Day, 1999b: p. 229).

On the other hand some people believe that effective teaching takes place if teachers have been exposed to the foundations of education. Philosophy of education is central to the practice of teaching. In this regard, Kagan (1990, p.85) suggested that, "as we learn more about the teacher, we are likely to come closer to understanding how effective teachers are made". Knowledge of effective pedagogical practices seem to be topical in coming up with the profile of effective teaching.

Zimbabwe invested very heavily in human resources development in order to improve the quality of teaching in schools. Paucity of material resources is a factor that contributes to ineffective teaching in primary schools. Chingos & West (2010) argue that the quality of learning materials such as textbooks is an important ingredient in improving instructions. It is not the buildings themselves that are critical for effective teaching and learning but the quality of the processes that take place within the buildings (Butts, 2010). Physical infrastructures will have an impact if they prevent work from being done. Peterson (2009) has blamed the dramatically lower number of learning hours in developing countries. Students standing in lecture rooms without being able to take lecture notes impacts negatively on the quality of education. Sawchuck (2011) has found high correlation between electricity in the school and pupils achievements. There are positive effects of electricity such as long study hours, utilisation of television, electronic equipment and tools.

Provision of effective teaching in primary schools is compromised if no attention is paid to the general physical and psycho-social emotional environmental. Despite the Zimbabwean Government's effort to provide quality resources such as infrastructure materials, qualified personal, physical facilities, expatriate teachers and financial assistance to promote effective teaching in primary schools students still fail in final grade seven public examinations. The Ministry of Education and Culture of Zimbabwe tried to put into action policies with an intention to minimise failure rate especially at final grade seven examinations.

The desire for effective and learning has become a driving force in the 21st century, hence this study. Teachers need to focus on educational practices that provide all learners with knowledge and skills necessary to contribute to the global society. It is not possible to determine if certain teaching behaviors are effective without knowing whether or not students learn as an end result of these behaviours. The challenge for the teacher is not only to identify and develop mastery of certain instructional strategies and behaviours accepted as effective practices, but the teacher is also challenged to develop the ability to effectively match these strategies and behaviours, at the appropriate time, to individual students and student groups, in specific teaching situations as these relate to the teacher's desired student learning outcomes (Hunt, Touzel & Wiseman, 2009).

2. Statement of the problem

Despite the fact that the government of Zimbabwe provides useful and viable resources to positively lift the standards of the education system, but in some schools pupils are not able to read or write. However pathetically students with reference to rural primary schools perform academically poor for example zero percent pass rate at Grade Seven final examinations.

3. Research questions

- 1.3.1 How does the availability of instructional materials contribute towards effective teaching in primary schools?
- 1.3.2 What is the effect of supervision on effective teaching and learning?
- 1.3.3 To what extent is the socio-economic background of students affecting effective teaching and learning?
- 1.3.4 How do teachers' instructional practices affect teaching and learning?

4. Conceptual framework

Effective teaching is hard to define. It is argued that effective teaching is important for raising student achievement (Hande, Kamath & D'Souza, 2014). Lorin (2004) suggested that effective teaching is one that produces demonstrable results in terms of the cognitive and affective development of the students and hence it is an important component in every teaching professional. It is argued that effective teaching involves far more than presenting content and methods used to convey that content. Equally important are the affective or emotional processes involved in learning, the integration and application of new information and social processes that take place between individuals and their environments (Illeris, 2002).

5. Theoretical framework: Conditions of learning theory: Robert Gagne

The theory on conditions of learning was propounded by Robert Gagne and the theory stipulates that there are several different types or levels of learning. It emphasises the significance of the classifications in that each different type requires different types of instruction. Gagne identifies five major categories of learning which include among others, verbal information, intellectual skills, cognitive strategies, motor skills and attitudes. The theory advances that different internal and external conditions are necessary for each type of learning. For instance, for cognitive strategies to be learned, there must be a chance to practice developing new solutions to problems; to learn attitudes, the learner must be exposed to a credible role model or persuasive arguments (Gagne, 1962; Gagne, 1985, Gagne, 1987, Gagne & Driscoll, 1988).

Gagne suggests that learning tasks for intellectual skills can be organised in a hierarchy according to complexity: stimulus recognition, response generation, procedure following, use of terminology, discriminations, concept formation, rule application, and problem solving. The primary significance of the hierarchy is to identify prerequisites that should be completed to facilitate learning at each level. Prerequisites are identified by doing a task analysis of a learning/training task. Learning hierarchies provide a basis for the sequencing of instruction.

In addition, the theory outlines nine instructional events and corresponding cognitive processes:

1. Gaining attention (reception)
2. Informing learners of the objective (expectancy)
3. Stimulating recall of prior learning (retrieval)
4. Presenting the stimulus (selective perception)
5. Providing learning guidance (semantic encoding)
6. Eliciting performance (responding)
7. Providing feedback (reinforcement)
8. Assessing performance (retrieval)
9. Enhancing retention and transfer (generalisation).

These events should satisfy or provide the necessary conditions for learning and serve as the basis for designing instruction and selecting appropriate media (Gagne, Briggs & Wager, 1992). This theory is relevant for this study since it advances that different internal and external conditions are necessary for effective learning in schools.

6. Literature

Effective teaching is considered as a mystery by some authors (Goldhaber, 2002). Porter & Brophy (1988) in their study on the synthesis of research on good teaching identified that effective teachers are clear about their instructional goals, are knowledgeable about the content, communicate well, monitor students' understanding, are thoughtful and respectful about their teaching practices. On another note, in a study on conceptions of effective teaching, Saroyan et al (2009) found out that students expressed four ideas about effective teaching. Effective teachers have knowledge, prepare and manage instruction, promote learning and help students grow so they can learn independently. Fuhrman et al (2010) carried out a study on effective teaching and found that effective teachers exhibit passion for their subjects, are knowledgeable about and care for students, use a variety of teaching strategies and help students appreciate the relevance of information to their own context. Sprinkle (2009) studied students' perceptions of effective teaching and found out that students considered effective teachers as those who employ a variety of teaching styles and make real world applications. Effective teachers exhibit humor, enthusiasm, compassion, empathy and are interested in and concerned for students' outside the classroom. Pietrzak, Duncan & Korcuska, (2008) found effective teachers to be possessing a degree of knowledge, effective delivery style, organisation and known for the amount of assigned homework.

School climate contributes towards school effectiveness. Guffey (2013) notes that school climate has an impact on the effectiveness of teachers in the school. It is argued that the way an individual or a person in an organisation performs is determined by the organisational setting, in this case its climate. In a school where there is no bridge between school leadership and teachers the climate is conducive for effective teaching and learning. Where there is dialogue between the head, teachers and the pupils a healthy school climate prevails. Schools where communication is considered as the lifeblood of the organisation breed effective teaching and learning environments.

The socio-economic background of students plays a major impact on their performance at school. Literature argues that materials factors such as income play a part in determining levels of education. The lower social classes may lack the money to provide their children with same educational opportunities as middle and upper class parents. This then means that some pupils from low status families fail to perform effectively despite the fact that schools are adequately equipped with resources (Hill, 2014).

Caro (2009) is also of opinion that some pupils do not perform well as a result of being constantly send home to collect fees. Consequently these pupils cannot be in a position to do well although schools have relevant and adequate resources to be utilised for the successful accomplishments of targeted goals and objectives. Matimbe (2014) is of the view that lack of instructional materials such as syllabi and textbooks to use during teaching and learning process negatively affects effective teaching. Najumba (2013) asserts that ineffective funding and budgetary cutbacks is visible in the erosions of standards of teaching. It results in declining library standards, paucity of new text references books and journals.

It is argued there are certain home conditions that affect pupils' school achievements. Children who lack provision of reading materials perform poorly in schools. A pupil who does not have his background which has resources like books sometimes perform poorly at school although she/he is taught by high qualified teachers.

Chingos & West (2010) are of the view that the level of education and occupational positions of parents are important determinants pupils' achievement. Some pupils from lowly educated parents do not perform well at school because they lack motivation and parental support that even if teachers are qualified still those pupils fail. Delvin, Kift & Nelson, (2012) also add that ineffectiveness on the part of pupils are higher from families of low socio-economic status no matter which particular factors are used to measure socio-economic status.

This should indicate that inadequate materials such as textbooks within the home background and lowly educated parents should not be regarded as a total effect in pupils' poor performance in rural primary schools. The diverse individual aptitude of pupils should also be taken into consideration. Within the poor background may be born a genius. In addition it is not always only the performers from low income families who tend to be ineffective as far as academic achievement is concerned. Some children from even rich families may also perform academically poor due to other factors though poor performers among children from well to do families are rare.

Time management is raised as a factor that contributes towards ineffective teaching. Some students are always out on sports. All play no work negatively impacts on school performance. It is important for teachers to manage their time and cover the whole syllabus so that pupils gain adequate content to tackle examinations. Schools that are efficient in terms of time management are at an advantage in terms of effectiveness. School efficiency is a measure of how well resources are being utilised to produce outputs. The most important resource which schools should effectively use is time (Delvin, Kift & Nelson, 2012).

Najumba (2013) in his studies of school achievement discovered that schools which are well equipped with relevant educational facilities which comprise instructional materials such as textbooks, libraries and even laboratories do much better in standardised examination such as grade seven than those which do not have resources. Then the major factor that ignites teacher effectiveness towards teaching in primary schools is the availability of instructional materials such as charts, textbooks and syllabi. However pupils still fail if teachers lack didactical and pedagogical skills and if these resources are underutilized.

It is argued that for effective teaching and learning to take place, teachers need to possess some sufficient degree of experience. Mavhundutse (2014) is of the view that experience is one of the major factors contributing towards effective teaching. Most people argue that experience is the best teacher. On the contrary, Department of Education (2012) found that those teachers who had been recently trained and less experienced are more effective than the more experienced. It has the idea that newly trained qualified personnel have more to offer since they have new knowledge, skills and experience as compared to those with longer experience. The question that comes in mind is whether teachers employ the gained skills. Tshabalala (2014) advances the argument that the quality of teacher training has an impact on teaching methods and improvement of skills.

Butts (2010) discovered that in Iraq the successful achievement of pupils whose teachers had pre-service training was higher in subjects such as Chemistry and Biology but made no difference in student achievement in Physics. To this end, teacher training colleges should not become a substitute for secondary education.

It is argued that children who use classrooms furniture obtained a much higher level of reading achievement than those without adequate furniture. Fernandez (2014) says that the quality of learning materials such as text books is an ingredient of education. Sawchuck (2011) posits that the provision of textbooks at a ratio of either one book per child or one book for every two children make a very significant difference on achievement. Fernandez (2014) cautions that it is not the aggregated sum of various inputs that account for levels of quality, more is not necessary better but management capacity of teachers and how well they use resources in the classroom.

Many researchers argue that the availability of the textbooks appears to be the most consistent factor in predicting teacher effectiveness towards teaching in primary schools. Studies in different countries show a correlation between textbooks and educational achievement. In Uganda strong correlation was found between textbooks availability in the classroom and students examination performance regardless of students' socio-economic status. Chingos & West (2010) propound that children without textbooks achieved significantly lower test scores than those who had textbooks.

What this high correlation between textbooks and achievement shows is not the only the effect on individual student, but also the effect of how a teacher has when using text books when few or no students have text books, the teacher has to use the text books as a guide, and rely on the blackboard or on oral dictation and students have to copy materials into their own note books. This wastes the time and every of both teacher and student and

consequently student fail even if they have qualified and enough instructed materials. Teachers can vary teaching techniques if there are adequate textbooks.

Delvin et al (2011) warns that mere availability of materials are therefore not enough. More innovative ways of understanding how schools work and how quality may be improved are the issues. Centre for Education Policy Research (2010) further propounds that although some gains in learning will result just from giving text books to children, learning gains can be increased much more if teachers organise students' use of their text books.

However, even if the school has instructional learning materials to use such as text books, furniture, syllabi, students still failure if these teaching materials are not revised because some of them may be out dated or not relevant to the curriculum taught this means that high pass rate at grade seven examinations will not be achieved.

7. Research Methodology

This was a qualitative study and convenience sampling was employed. Semi-structured interviews were used (Strauss and Corbin, 1990). It is argued that good interviews are those in which the subjects are at ease and talk freely about their points of view. Good interviews produce rich data filled with words that reveal the respondents' perspectives (Bogdan and Biklen, 1992, p. 97).

Convenience sampling was used. In qualitative research, the researcher should try to pick a setting or a group that is large enough so that the researcher does not stand out, but small enough so that one is not overwhelmed by the task (Bogdan & Biklen 1992:64). Using Erlandson et al.'s (1993) interactive process of data analysis, themes that emerged from semi structured interviews formed the basis of the findings.

8. Findings

Participant 1: Most teachers seem not to employ varied teaching methods. Even in cases when the teacher finds out that children did not understand or grasp the concept taught he/she may not try another method.

Participant 2: The use of media is has been forgotten. There is no use of media in the teaching and learning

Participant 3: Teachers stick to text books and are too busy to get more relevant information from variety of instructional material. They tend to focus just on one source of information, the text book.

Participant 4: Harsh environments which lack incentives have destroyed the whole morale in teachers. They seem deplorable and lack extra time at work

Participant 5: Most pupils lack parental support in terms of extra materials such as text books and revision books. It is important that parents provide extra lessons for their children. They should try hard to purchase extra learning material and to help children do home work as a way of motivating them to learn for this promotes effective learning.

Participant 6: Teachers lack effective pedagogy to influence effective of teaching. Teachers' instructional practices are poor.

Participant 7: Some teachers have low level of training to influence effective teaching and learning

Participant 8: Teachers lack time management skills to cover curriculum.

Participant 9: Teachers do not use variety of instructional materials.

Participant 10: Scheming and planning is poorly done. Some teachers do not plan at all.

It is argued that there is need for teachers to have exposure, immersion and mastery for effective teaching to take place (Whiteley et al, 2014).

Participant 11: Teachers lack effective questioning techniques.

Participant 12: Some teachers do not give pupils work according to their level of cognitive development and this confuses learners.

Participant 13: *There is no provision of individualised instruction. Children do not get individualised learning plans to meet their needs. Many misunderstandings go uncorrected and this results in poor performance by students.*

Participant 14: *School heads do not supervise teachers. There are some teachers who have never been supervised for the past ten years. They do not have any supervision reports. Such lack of supervision is likely to lead to complacency. Some kind of supervision is necessary to boost teachers' morale.*

Participant 15: *One wonders why the Ministry employs unqualified teachers in schools. There are quite a number of qualified teachers who are loafers of the streets and against that you notice people with a degree in engineering being offered a vacancy to teach grade three class. It is really surprising. This time it is even worse because teachers on leave are not replaced. This creates a gap in terms of class size. The teacher who remains with abnormal and unmanageable class becomes frustrated and really demoralised.*

It is argued in educational theory and practice that a demoralised teacher is not an effective teacher at all.

Participant 16: *While it is a novel idea that Early Childhood Development (ECD) should be taught in the primary school, the question of the quality of the teacher should be seriously considered. Some schools just employ people from the villages who are just blind. This is wasting children's time. Such teachers lack knowledge of subject matter.*

Participant 17: *Some children come from illiterate parents who do not even know the value of education. They are taken to the fields particularly in cotton growing areas to work in the fields. This is painful because when they eventually go back to school after such high level of absenteeism, they look confused. They would have missed a lot from the content. It becomes difficult for one to perform well after losing lessons for quite some time. This breeds poor academic performance.*

Participant 18: *Lack of parental support has negative effects towards learning. Children whose homework is not supervised always face challenges in class.*

Participant 19: *Some schools lack text books. You find pupils scrambling for text books. That formula of having one child reading for the whole class while others are listening does not work. It leads to disaster in performance.*

Fernandez (2014) argues that the availability of textbooks appears to be most consistent factor in predicting teacher effectiveness towards teaching in primary schools. This then implies that if a school lacks adequate instructional materials such as textbooks and revision books, it is leading to a disaster.

Participant 20: *knowledge of special needs education is also important these days. Learners are just combined in the regular classes and if the teacher does not know how to handle the mixed bag then no effective teaching takes place. Learners with various forms of disabilities like visual impairment, mentally retarded, physically challenged, among others, just learn in one class these days. Teachers need to know strategies of handling such kind of situations. The most unfortunate part is that special needs education is a missing link for many teachers. They went to train before the aspect was in the teacher education curriculum. Unless one has been exposed to the concept through workshops then most teachers are at sea.*

9. Conclusions

Socio- economic background contributes to teacher effectiveness. Teachers teaching pedagogy influence effective teaching. Explanation and demonstration are useful in the teaching and learning. Grouping pupils according to ability for promotes teacher effectiveness. School based factors contribute to teacher effectiveness. Friendly atmosphere in an organisation contribute to teacher effectiveness. Children from literate parents seemed to be more influence to teacher. Variety teaching learning materials in scheming and planning promote effective teaching. Different questioning techniques promote teacher effectiveness.

10. Recommendations

Schools should strive to keep accurate records for each child. Heads and teachers should endeavor to follow up in pupils being continuously absent from schools by contacting parents concerned. Effective leadership styles should be employed in schools for the sake of promoting teaching and learning. Government should provide learning materials to disadvantage families. Team work should be encouraged so that all people work towards

improved performance. Parents should be educated about their support as far as learning is concerned. Teachers should frequently reminded the use of media during teaching and learning processes

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