

EDUCATION FOR ALL: 50 YEARS AFTER ZAMBIA'S INDEPENDENCE

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Abstract

This article explains that although there has been progress towards increased access to primary education for grades 1 to 7 over the years, there has been no similar progress for junior secondary school, grades 8 to 9. Thus access to nine years of basic education still remains a challenge, especially among the vulnerable pupils. In addition, the quality of education in most primary and junior secondary schools is poor. It argues that it is not only important to get children into school but it is also important to ensure that they stay in school, receive good quality education and complete a full cycle of basic education. As such, the 2015 target of attaining nine years of basic education for all may not be accomplished if developing countries such as Zambia will not strengthen their focus on out-of-school children and improving the quality of education. In view of the foregoing, the article recommended that the Government of the Republic of Zambia, Non-governmental Organisations and other stakeholders should put in place measures that will ensure that vulnerable children (including girls) stay in school; that teachers and schools have all the requisites for offering quality basic education; and that there are incentives for teachers working in the most rural schools.

Introduction

For about 50 years now, the provision of nine years of basic education has been the concern of the government of Zambia. Over the years Zambia has made progress towards increased access to primary education, for grades 1 to 7. Access to education for pupils in Grades 8 to 9 still remains a challenge especially among the vulnerable pupils. In addition, the quality of education in most primary schools and some Junior Secondary schools is poor. It is argued here that it is not only important to get children into school but it is also important to ensure that they stay in school, receive good quality education and complete a full cycle of basic education.

Nine Years Basic Education Goal

The Government of the Republic of Zambia has a long standing educational goal of achieving universal nine years of Basic Education. This goal could be traced to the time of the struggle for independence in the 1960s when the nationalist movement set the goal that every Zambian

should be able to complete at least a Junior Secondary Education (Ministry of Education, 1977). Similarly, for decades issues related to Universal Basic Education have been the concern of many nations across the globe. All appear to support the achievement of Education for All. From the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948, which declared that every person had the right to education and called for compulsory elementary education (UNESCO, 2000) up to the International Conference on Universal Primary Education, held in Jomtien, Thailand, in 1990 (UNESCO, 1990), governments of both developed and developing countries committed themselves to providing Universal Basic Education. The Jomtien Conference was followed by the Dakar World Education Forum held in Senegal, in the year 2000 (UNESCO, 2000) where governments across the globe renewed their commitment to providing Education for All. At the Dakar Forum, national governments including the Zambian government, civil society groups, and development agencies met and adopted the Dakar Framework for Action, *Education for All: Meeting our Collective Commitments*. They committed to achieving six specific education goals by 2015. These were:

- i) Goal 1: Expand early childhood care and education;
- ii) Goal 2: Provide free and compulsory primary education for all;
- iii) Goal 3: Promote learning and life skills for youths and adults;
- iv) Goal 4: Increase adult literacy by 50 per cent;
- v) Goal 5: Achieve gender parity by 2005, gender equality by 2015; and
- vi) Goal 6: Improve the quality of education (UNESCO, 2000).

The current national policy on Basic Education also stipulates that the goal of the Ministry of Education is that every child should have access to nine years of good quality education by the year 2015 (Ministry of Education, 1996). In this vein, the Ministry of Education put in place interventions such as the Basic Education Sub-Sector Investment Programme (BESSIP) and Free Basic Education Policy aimed at improving access to education. The Basic Education Sub-Sector Investment Programme ran from 1999 to 2002 (Musonda, 2003:22). BESSIP was Zambia's first comprehensive programme with the aim of implementing the 1996 current National policy on Basic Education (Musonda, 2003). BESSIP's main objectives were twofold: i) increase enrolment at grades 1-7 and reverse the decline in enrolment by providing access to education for all eligible children; ii) improve learning achievements, especially in literacy and mathematics (de Kemp, *et al*, 2008:36). Essentially, BESSIP had developmental objectives of

improving access, quality, equity and relevance of basic education. BESSIP sought to improve access to Basic Education through:

- a) constructing new schools in order to reduce walking distances to a maximum of five kilometres;
- b) reducing school costs for parents by providing grants to schools;
- c) enrolling children who had dropped out or had never gone to school;
- d) offering more bursaries to vulnerable children (girls, orphans, the poor and
- e) children in rural areas) (de Kemp, *et al*, 2008:37).

However, the implementation of BESSIP began at a slow pace. de Kemp, *et al* (2008:38) explains: "The slow restructuring process at the Ministry of Education and the slow pace of decentralisation hindered effective implementation of BESSIP at the local level."

In 2002, the late President of Zambia, Levy Mwanawasa, announced the Free Basic Education for Grades 1 to 7 (Ministry of Education, 2002:2). Primary school tuition fees were abolished as part of renewed attempts to improve access and retention, especially of vulnerable children.

Challenges in meeting the nine years Basic Education Goal

The problem of access to schooling especially at grades 8 and 9 (Junior Secondary level) have continued in Zambia. The Ministry of Finance and National Planning (2013:23) notes that the completion rate for Grade 9 (basic school) increased from 35.3 percent in 2002 to 53.2 percent in 2010. This implies that there were still children of school going - age who were supposed to be in school but were not. Mwanza's (2013) study revealed that this was because most parents could not afford to pay school fees for their children.

On the other hand, since the introduction of the Free Primary Education Policy in 2002 in Zambia, there has been rapid increase in enrolment figures at primary level. Net enrolment of children in primary education increased from 80 percent in 1990 to 93.7 percent in 2010 (Ministry of Finance and National Planning, 2013:22). Although, these improvements have been largely applauded, the quality of education in many developing countries including Zambia is questionable. Actually, in most cases, improvements in access to primary education have not

being accompanied by improvements in the quality of education offered. Low student learning achievements were evident in the education system. For example, regional assessments conducted by the Southern and Eastern Africa Consortium for Monitoring Educational Quality (SACMEQ) in 2007 revealed that in Malawi and Zambia, over a third of grade 6 students had failed to acquire even the most basic literacy skills, meaning that many were unable to read fluently after five to six years of primary education (UNESCO, 2011:84). Indeed, learning achievement is one of the vital indicators for quality education in Zambia as the Examinations Council of Zambia (2013:6) noted learning achievement remained at low levels with mean scores in English and Mathematics in Grade 5, for example, stood at 35% and 38% respectively. The research findings by Mwanza (2013) show that the provision of good quality education in the majority of schools was poor due to the following factors: lack of trained teachers; inadequate teaching and learning materials; dilapidated and inadequate infrastructure; inadequate and poor sanitary conditions; poor learning environment; pupil absenteeism especially in rural areas; and teacher absenteeism particularly in rural areas.

In Zambia, many schools do not have adequate teaching and learning materials. For example, Mwanza (2013) in her study found that in most schools textbooks were inadequate. The book-pupil ratio was 1:7. In some schools, it was common to find more than 7 pupils sharing one textbook. The situation was worse off in rural areas as there were situations where there was only one core textbook for the teacher or no textbooks at all. Due to lack of teaching and learning materials teaching methods were severely restricted. As a result, much teaching in schools is by rote-learning teaching practices where students are encouraged to learn by memorisation. Though, it must be pointed out that sometimes teachers themselves fail to implement student-centred methodologies in their teaching. From the author's observations, some teachers interacted with pupils almost only through question-and answer and chalk-and-talk methods. Students were not given an opportunity to ask questions but only responded to close-ended questions asked by the teacher. As Altinyelken (2010:151) notes: "In the majority of African classrooms, pedagogical practices are described as authoritarian, teacher dominated and lecture-driven". Indeed, this affects the delivery of quality education.

Furthermore, the large class sizes especially in urban areas adversely affected the delivery of quality education. Lesson duration was set at 40 minutes at the schools that one of these authors

visited. However, given the average class size at most schools about 70 students and in some cases 100, much potential teaching time was wasted organising and managing the classroom. In Mwanzaø (2013) study teachers pointed out that it was difficult to enforce discipline among students due to large class sizes which made teaching difficult.

Moreover, teaching methods were restricted by poor school infrastructure. The crumbling school buildings with classrooms designed for 40 rather than 70 or more students adversely affected teaching methods and consequently the quality of education. There were also inadequate desks in most schools (Mwanza, 2013). The Examinations Council of Zambia (2010) reports:

The provision of desks in schools has long been a major challenge for the Ministry of Education. In most of the schools sampled, 3 to 4 pupils were using two-seater desks. There were also schools where pupils sat on the floor or improvised their own seating arrangements (ECZ, 2010:8).

In addition, availability of teachersø furniture in the classroom is inadequate. The 2008 National Assessment survey conducted by the Examinations Council of Zambia reveal that there is scanty and poor teachersø furniture in most basic schools in Zambia. This is shown in Table 1 below:

Table 1: Availability of Teachers’ Furniture in the Classroom

	Availability of Teachersø Furniture in Classroom (%)	Quality of Teachersø Furniture in Classroom (%)
Not available	18.9	16.6
Very poor	14	14.2
Poor	21.8	24.3
Fair	26.8	24.9
Good	14.3	16.2
Very good	4.2	3.8

Source: Examinations Council of Zambia (2010:70)

Indeed, having adequate desks and other forms of furniture available in classrooms provides an environment conducive to learning; their non-availability creates difficult learning conditions.

In addition, the quality of education is compromised by the fact that rural children are less interested in attending school. Research findings by Mwanza (2013) revealed that many rural households were dependent on their children especially at busy times of the farming season such as harvest time.

The quality of education is also affected by lack of trained teachers in most schools even after 50 years of Zambia's attainment of independence. The Global campaign for Education (2004:4) reports: "Zambia's education achievement is being undermined by a severe shortage of teachers. Something like 9000 vacancies remain unfilled, while almost exactly the same number of recently qualified teachers sits unemployed." The problem of shortage of teachers in Zambia may be regarded as a problem of teacher numbers. While there is no doubt that Zambia faces challenges of teacher supply, there are equally serious challenges of teacher deployment. In 2014 in Zambia, there were many qualified teachers in urban areas who were unemployed, while there were unfilled posts in rural areas. This is because of the change in government policy with regards to recruitment and deployment. Before the early 2000s recruitment of newly qualified teachers was normally automatic. However, from late 2000s onwards there had been policy change relating to teacher recruitment and deployment (Subulwa, 2000:26). There were often delays in deployment of newly qualified teachers as it depended on the availability of funds. Even when deployment of teachers was done, many teachers preferred to work in urban areas to rural areas. As a consequence, schools in rural areas may be left with empty posts, or have longer delays in filling posts.

In addition, teacher absenteeism in Zambia may be contributing to the low quality of education especially in rural areas. The Examinations Council of Zambia (2010) points out that absenteeism, late-coming and knocking off early continue to be a problem among teachers. Clearly, these are issues that have an adverse bearing on learning achievement of pupils, because they all reduce the time for teacher-pupil interactions. In fact, teachers in rural areas in Zambia tend to teach less than their counterparts in urban areas. Any trip away from the rural area, for example, to visit a doctor might involve long journeys and involve missed school days. Moreover, where teachers walk long distances to school, they tend to start late, and finish early.

Indeed, quality in education is crucial for the achievement of EFA. The notion of quality in education encompasses more than simply a better school environment, more qualified teaching staff, and an adequate supply of teaching and learning materials. Quality also means as Aikman and Unterhalter (2005: 4) write:

í the framing of the curriculum, the content and form of learning materials, the nature of the pedagogy, and teacher-pupil relations. Quality requires gender-sensitive use of human resources, and considerations of gender in the allocation of finances. Quality education entails a concern to include the views of all members of a community, and to take account of local languages and cultures. A quality education is not therefore acquired in isolation from the social setting in which students live. It embraces the notion of education as a transformative process which promotes social change and contributes to building a just and democratic society. A quality education rejects gender discrimination and social injustice. Quality education cannot be achieved without gender equality and equity.

Conclusion and Recommendations

After 50 years of independence, Zambia is still struggling with issues of access and quality in education. At independence, access and quality of education were challenges (Kelly, 1999). Therefore, the 2015 target of attaining nine years of basic education for all may not be accomplished if developing countries such as Zambia will not strengthen their focus on out-of-school children and improving the quality of education.

In view of the aforesaid, it is recommended that:

1. The Government and all stakeholders need to provide and strengthen the provision of bursaries to vulnerable, orphaned and girl children in schools.
2. The Government, Non-governmental Organisations and all stakeholders need to help teachers make learning and teaching child-centred and engaging. Therefore, Continuing Professional Development with a focus on learner-centred and discovery approaches must be provided to teachers.

3. Colleges of Education should be well equipped with books, teaching aids and other training materials for effective training of teachers. Also, their curricula must reflect real needs of primary and secondary schools.
4. Non-governmental Organisations and all stakeholders should collaborate with the government to ensure that adequate and appropriate teaching-learning materials are provided to schools.
5. The Government and all stakeholders should ensure that there is an adequate supply of qualified teachers in schools. These must have both Diploma and/or first degree qualifications.
6. The Government, co-operating partners, Non-governmental Organisations and all stakeholders must make working in rural areas attractive through the use of incentives. Incentives can be in the form of a hardship allowance, subsidised housing or better training opportunities. Conditions of service for teachers must be attractive in such a way as to retain them.

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