

A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF DEAF AND BLIND PUPILS' ACCESS TO PRIMARY SCHOOL EDUCATION IN URBAN AND RURAL AREAS OF ZAMBIA

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Abstract

The article compares pupils with hearing and visual impairments' access to primary school education in urban and rural areas of Zambia. Data were collected from 408 respondents in fifteen primary schools. The study revealed that more children with hearing and visual impairments in rural areas entered grade one between 2006 and 2012 than their counterparts in urban areas. However, more pupils in urban schools progressed to grade seven than their counterparts in rural areas. This situation implies that more pupils dropped out of school in rural areas than their counterparts in urban areas. As regards gender, 44% of the female pupils in rural areas dropped out of school compared to 21% of their counterparts in urban areas. Long distance to schools, failure by parents or guardians to pay fees demanded by schools, negative attitude of parents and children towards school, poor academic performance and early marriages contributed to the high dropout rate.

Introduction and Background to the study

Pupils with hearing and visual impairment may also be referred to as being deaf and blind. The literal meaning of being deaf is complete inability to hear sound. Such pupils rely on sign language for communication. While being blind implies complete loss of sight. When a person has residue sight, it implies that he or she has partial sight. For the purpose of this study the words 'deaf and blind' have been used synonymously with hearing and visual impairments to refer to a situation of complete loss of hearing or sight and partial hearing or sight. The word 'urban' has been used to denote towns in provincial centres while 'rural' to refer to towns outside provincial centres. As regards education, pupils with hearing and visual impairments have the right to basic education (Education Act of 2011:14.1b). Additionally, Disability Act (2012:22.2a) states in part that "*persons with disabilities should not be discriminated from the general education on the basis of their disability*". Similarly, the United Nations and the Convention on Rights of Children (1989), Chondoka *et al.* (2012) and Education for All Conference (1990) describe education as a human right. This implies that all children in the world must have access to basic or primary school education. In other words, conventional education is a key to all forms of success. For instance, education has the power to transform an individual into an industrialist, great leader, bread winner, an analyst and self-reliant. Despite the value and importance of education to all pupils including those with disabilities, studies on access to primary school education seem to omit pupils with disabilities including those with hearing and visual impairments (Ndhlovu and Mtonga, 2013). It is against this background that the researchers appreciate that research brings out statistics that may work as a basis for funding and support. But when pupils with hearing and visual impairments are omitted from studies, it raises concern as to which group between urban and rural areas access education more than the other and whether there were similarities between factors that affect access to primary school education in rural and urban schools in Zambia? In order to seek answers for these questions, a study of this nature became necessary.

Statement of the problem

A study by Ndhlovu and Mtonga (2013) on impact of free primary education on pupils' access to primary education found that despite mixed views, Free Education Policy on primary education (grades 1-7) had made significant impact on pupils with hearing and visual impairments' access to education in primary schools in Zambia. Notable areas cited included: reduced absenteeism, increased gross intake levels, increased grade seven completion rates and improved academic performance. Based on these findings, the following questions were stimulated which group between urban and rural areas accessed education more than the other and established factors that affected access to primary school education in rural and urban schools in Zambia? A study of this nature was therefore, necessary to provide answers to these questions.

Purpose of the study

The study sought to compare pupils with hearing and visual impairments' access to primary school education between rural and urban areas in Zambia and determine which one between the two groups accessed education more than the other. In addition, establish factors that affected access to primary school education in rural and urban schools in Zambia.

Objectives of the study

The study objectives were to:

1. identify factors that affect access to primary school education in rural and urban areas.
2. determine similarities of factors that affect access to primary school education in rural and urban areas.
3. establish whether more pupils with hearing and visual impairments in urban primary areas access education than their counterparts in rural areas.

Literature Review

This section explores literature on access to education among pupils with hearing and visual impairments. It further provides a comparative understanding about which group of pupils between those in urban and rural areas access education more than the other.

Mwanakatwe (1974) reported that from the colonial days, there was more concentration on providing better social and educational services in urban than rural regions. At that time, this approach was acceptable because the rural geographical regions of Zambia (Northern Rhodesia at that time) were difficult to reach due lack of proper road infrastructure. Additionally, the British settlers sought to provide better social services for themselves in urban areas than Africans. After independence, there was however, a realisation of the educational disparities between educational provision in rural and urban areas. To this effect, Beyani (2012) stated that the government of Zambia laboured to increase and expand on infrastructure and enrolment levels in rural schools.

A study conducted by the Zambia Open Community Schools (ZOCS) (2012) revealed that about 56% of basic schools still charge user fees which they have given different names. The study also revealed that about 67% of the drop-out pupils attributed their inability to continue with

school to user fees charged by schools. Another study by ZOCS (2012) indicated that there were higher numbers of girl pupils at lower primary schools (grades 1-4). However, the numbers of girl pupils reduced as they got to upper primary (grades 5-7) and secondary school (grades 8-12).

UNICEF (1999) reported that there were fewer pupils in rural areas who went up to grade seven and consequently qualified to high schools. Similarly, Ministry of Education (2003) observed that there were huge disparities between the provision of education in rural and urban areas. The Ministry of Education (2004) also presented that 10% of female pupils dropped out of school before they reached grade seven in rural areas while only 1% of girls dropped out of school in urban areas. Surprisingly, all these studies did not include pupils with disabilities prompting the researchers to wonder whether these disparities between rural and urban schools in terms of access to education existed among pupils with disabilities particularly those with hearing and visual impairments.

Ministry of Education (1996) indicated that the Zambian education system was basically divided into four blocks: early childhood education, basic education (now primary education), high school education and tertiary education. Each of these blocks has factors affecting access to education between rural and urban areas. As regards to factors affecting access to early childhood education, Chompolola (2012) reported that only 17% of grade one entrants every year in Zambia had received some preschool education. Of those children who had early childhood education, 82% were in urban area and only 18% were in rural areas. This creates a distinct disparity between urban and rural areas in terms of access to education by children. In terms of performance, UNESCO (2010) found that throughout the world, children who received early education were 70% more advantaged than those who did not receive any. Despite the importance of early childhood education, Zambia Federation of Disability Organisations (2010) reports that there were literally no schools providing early childhood education for children with disabilities including those with hearing and visual impairments in Zambia.

As regards enrolment in basic schools, UNICEF (2009) reported that enrolments of children with special educational needs in Zambia had increased due to governments strategies to promote access to education. Similarly, Ministry of Education (2010) reported that the number of learners with disabilities that accessed basic education had increased. But the challenge of appropriate facilities and infrastructure continued to negatively affect access to basic education. It implies that despite the increasing enrolments, the progression of the learners was not assured due to lack of sufficient resources and infrastructure for the vulnerable children including those with disabilities.

UNESCO (2009) found that due to the disparity in terms of access to education between rural and urban areas, literacy levels among many rural regions were low. Factors that attributed to lower access to education by rural children included failure by most parents to raise funds to pay

for their children's education, long distance to school and high poverty levels among people in rural areas. Early marriages was also cited to be more rampant in rural than urban areas.

As regards whether there were similarities of factors that affected access to primary school education between children in rural areas and their counterparts in urban areas literature shows both similarities and differences exist. Ministry of Education (2010) reports that the increase in enrolment figures of pupils both in urban and rural areas were attributed to free basic education policy from grade 1-7 introduced in 2002, the re-entry policy introduced in 1997 to mandate schools to allow girls back into the school system who previously left school due to pregnancy and the bursary support to school leavers including orphans and vulnerable children introduced to promote access of education by children. The increase in the number of community schools also offered opportunities for more children to remain in school. Apart from similarities, there were also differences in the factors that affected access to primary education. A study by Kalabula (1994) reported that there were 31 residential schools for learners with disabilities in Zambia. These were inadequate and extensively scattered across the country. As a result, most pupils in rural areas had to travel long distances to access education. However, to date, it is not clear whether children with disabilities in rural areas equitably receive education compared to their counterparts in urban areas. Ndhlovu and Mtonga (2013) also found that distance, failure to pay for school fees, negative attitude of parents and children towards school affected access to education in Zambia. Similarly, a study conducted in India by UNESCO (1998) reports that although there was a general push for all children to access school, for those in rural areas, access to education was negatively affected due to distance and poverty levels. People in rural areas concentrated on earning and sustaining their physiological needs before turning to education. Mtonga and Simui (2012) also reported that literacy levels among guardians to children in rural areas contributed greatly to low access to education by their children. In addition, they observed that parents played a vital role in providing psychological encouragement to children to go to school. The situation was different in urban areas where the environment was so conducive that every child was influenced to go school.

Methodology

Since the study sought to compare pupils access to primary school education between rural and urban schools, a correlation study design was used. In addition, both qualitative and quantitative methods were used. Focus group discussions were conducted to yield qualitative data while quantitative methodology made use of questionnaires. Four hundred and eight (408) respondents participated in the study. These included: 15 head teachers, 67 teachers, 186 pupils (107 with hearing and 97 with visual impairments) and 140 parents. Gender of participants was also taken into consideration. See table 1 for the distribution of the sample by province and school.

Table 1: Distribution of sample by provinces and schools (N=408)

#	Province	School	Head teachers	Teachers	Pupils	Parents	Total
1	Lusaka	Desai (HI)	1	4	20	7	32
		Lusaka Girls (HI)	1	3	10	7	21
		UTH Special (HI)	1	5	7	10	23
2	Central	Lukanda Basic (HI)	1	5	10	10	26
		Broadway basic (HI)	1	5	10	10	26
3	Copperbelt	Ndola Lions (VI)	1	5	20	10	36
		Mano Basic (HI)	1	5	10	20	36
4	Southern	St Mulumba (VI)	1	4	19	10	34
		Holy Cross (VI)	1	5	10	10	26
		Mazabuka Basic (VI)	1	4	10	10	25
5	NorthWestern	Solwezi Basic (HI)	1	5	20	10	36
		Kanyihampa (HI)	1	4	10	7	22
		Kyamwina (HI)	1	3	10	4	18
6	Eastern	Magwero (HI)	1	5	10	5	21
7	Western	Sefula Basic (VI)	1	5	10	10	26
	Total		15	67	186	140	408

Legend: HI =hearing impairment while VI = Visual impairment

In order to provide each pupil and teacher in the population an equal chance to be selected and included in the study sample, simple random sampling procedure was used. Purposive sampling technique was used to select head teachers and parents of the children with hearing and visual impairments. This procedure enabled the researchers to select only head teachers and parents of children in the study sample. The quantitative data were analysed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) to obtain frequencies and percentages. Thematic analysis was used to analyse qualitative data. Regarding issues of ethical nature, consideration was made to keep the names of respondents anonymous. Consent was also obtained from the respondents before allowing them to participate in the study.

Findings and Discussion

Participants were asked to identify factors that affected access to primary school education in rural and urban areas. It was found that several factors existed. These are shown in table 4.

Table 4: Factors that Affected Access to Primary School Education in Rural and Urban Areas.

Variables used	Urban schools	Rural schools
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Gross intake	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • negative attitudes of parents and children • in adequate classroom space 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • negative attitudes of parents and children • long distance to school
Progression	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pregnancies • Street vending • Child guide to parents • Poor academic performance • Too big to learn together with young ones • Lack of sponsors 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Long distance to school • Poor academic performance • Failure to pay fees • Early marriages • Lack of sponsors • Too big to learn together with young ones

The fees charged by schools included those for civilian days, open days, stationery for tests, cobra, brooms and sugar. Similar findings on factors that affected access to primary school education were reported by Mwanakatwe (1974) who reported that there was inadequate infrastructure in rural areas compared to urban areas. UNESCO (2009) reported that failure by parents to raise funds to pay for their children in school, early marriages, long distance and high poverty levels among people in rural areas were among the factors that affected access to education in primary schools while ZAFOD (2010) also reported on lack of schools providing early childhood education. ZOCS (2012) also reported that 56% of basic schools in Zambia charged user fees under different names causing 67% of pupils to drop out of school in rural and urban areas. In order to promote access (gross intake and progression) to education there is need therefore, to address these factors.

Concerning similarities of factors that affected access to primary school education in rural and urban areas, the study found that negative attitude of parents and children towards education, feeling out of place due to over age, poor academic performance and failure to pay fees or lack of sponsors were common in both rural and urban schools.

As regards similarities of factors that positively affected access to education, presence of free policy on basic education, re-entry policy and increased infrastructure were common in both rural and urban schools. These findings were consistent with those of Ministry of Education (2010) who reported that the increase in enrolment figures of pupils both in urban and rural areas were attributed to free basic education policy from grade 1-7, the re-entry policy to mandate schools to allow girls back into the school system who previously left school due to pregnancy and the bursary support to school leavers, including vulnerable children among them those with hearing and visual impairments. Additionally, the increase in the number of community schools also offered opportunities for more children to enter and remain in school.

On the basis of literature (Mwanakatwe 1974, UNICEF 1999 and UNESCO 2009) showing that urban areas had more social and education facilities thereby having more ordinary pupils access education than their counterparts in rural areas, the study sought to establish whether more pupils with hearing and visual impairments in urban areas were admitted to grade one than their

counterparts in rural areas. In addition, whether more pupils with hearing and visual impairments in urban areas progressed to grade seven compared to their counterparts in rural areas.

The study found that more children with hearing and visual impairments in rural areas entered grade one than their counterparts in urban areas. Thus, 61% of children with hearing and visual impairments entered grade one compared to 39% of their counterparts in urban areas. This result is interesting because literature sight earlier showed that more ordinary pupils entered school than their counterparts in rural areas. The increase could be as a result of the policy on free basic education and increased infrastructure. Similarly, Ndhlovu and Mtonga (2012) reported that among the contributing factors to increased enrolment was the policy on free basic education. Beyani (2012) also alluded to increased infrastructure in rural areas. More girls with hearing and visual impairments in rural areas entered grade one than their counterparts in urban areas. Additionally, more boys with hearing and visual impairments in rural areas entered grade one than their counterparts in urban areas. See tables 2 and 3 for details.

As regards their progression, more pupils in urban schools than those in rural areas progressed to grade seven from 2006 to 2012. Thus, 77% of the pupils in urban schools progressed to grade seven as compared to 60% of their counterparts in rural schools. Details are shown in tables 2 and 3.

Table 2: Gross Intake of Urban Children into Grade 1 and their Progression to Grade 7

District	School	GIR in Grade 1 in 2006			Progression to Grade 7 in 2012		
		M	F	T	Male	Female	Total
Lusaka	Desai	6	3	9	6	3	9
	Lusaka Girls	1	5	6	1	5	6
	UTH Special	2	2	4	-	-	-
Kabwe	Broadway	6	4	10	3	2	5
Ndola	Ndola Lions	4	7	11	4	7	11
Livingstone	HolyCross	3	2	5	2	1	3
Solwezi	Solwezi	2	1	3	2	1	3
Total		24	24	48	18	19	37

Regend: M= male, F= female, T= total and GIR = gross intake ratio

Table 3 below shows gross intake and progression of pupils with hearing and visual impairments from grade one to seven by district, school and gender in rural areas.

Table 3: Gross Intake of Rural Children into Grade 1 and their Progression to Grade 7

District	School	GIR in Grade 1 in	Progression to Grade 7 in 2012
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		2006			Male	Female	Total
		M	F	T			
Kapirimposhi	Lukanda	3	2	5	1	0	1
Mufulira	Mano	6	6	12	6	6	12
Mufumbwe	Kyamwina	10	15	25	-	-	-
Choma	ST. Mulumba	8	10	18	8	10	18
Mazabuka	Mazabuka	4	3	7	4	2	6
Mongu	Sefula	3	5	8	3	5	8
Total		34	41	75	22	23	45

Legend: M= male, F= female, T= total and GIR = gross intake ratio

Notably 79% the females in urban areas progressed to grade seven as compared to 56% of their female counterparts in rural areas. Additionally, 75% of the males in urban areas who entered grade one progressed to grade seven compared to 65% of their counterparts in rural areas. These findings are consistent with those of Mtonga and Simui (2012) who found that the environment in urban schools was good to the point of influencing all children to access primary school education.

In terms of dropout rate, more pupils (40%) dropped out of school in rural areas than their counterparts (23%) in urban schools. This finding is consistent with that of UNESCO (1998) who reported that fewer pupils progressed to grade eight in rural areas than urban areas because people in rural areas concentrated on earning and sustaining their physiological needs before turning to education. As regards gender, 44% of the females with hearing and visual impairments in rural areas compared to 21% of their counterparts in urban areas dropped out of school. Similarly, Ministry of Education (2004) and Zambia Open Community Schools (ZOCS) (2012) found that more girls than boys dropped out of school in rural areas than in urban areas. The study also found that more males 35% dropped out of school before they reached grade seven compared to 25% of their counterparts from urban schools. Long distance and fees demanded by schools greatly contributed to high dropout rate among the pupils in rural schools. Similarly, UNESCO (2009) reported that long distance to school, high poverty level among people in rural areas and early marriages contributed to more pupils in rural areas dropping out of school than in urban areas.

Conclusion

The study concludes that although more pupils with hearing and visual impairments in rural areas entered grade one than their counterparts in urban areas, few of them progressed to grade seven. As a result, the dropout rate stood at 40% higher than 23% of their counterparts in urban areas. As regards to gender, 44% of females in rural areas dropped out of school before reaching grade seven compared to 21% of their counterparts in urban areas. This was attributed to long distance to schools, failure by parents or guardians to pay fees demanded by schools, negative attitude of parents and pupils towards school, poor academic performance and early marriages.

Recommendations

Based on the study findings, the following is recommended:

1. More studies on pupils with disabilities need to be conducted so that their needs become visible.
2. In order to address the challenge of long distance to schools, more special education units and schools for pupils with disabilities need to be built or established.
3. Ministry of Education, Science, Vocational Training and Early Childhood Education should continue sensitising parents, teachers and pupils about the importance of education.
4. Education Standard Officers should monitor schools regularly to ensure that the policy on free basic education is adhered to by all schools.

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