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An Evaluation of the Mushrooming of new 'Independent Colleges' in Zimbabwe with Special Emphasis on the Education of the Urban Child, 2000-2009.

Tichagwa, K., *Department of History, University of Zimbabwe*

Abstract

Using Harare city centre and its respective high density suburbs as case studies, this paper is an attempt to uncover the complexities of the provision of education that were brought about by the unstable political and economic situation in Zimbabwe from 2000. This situation reversed almost all of the government's efforts in strengthening the education system since 1980. Education institutions, in this case, secondary schools were affected in terms of both teaching staff and infrastructural resources. Boarding schools were without teachers and food to feed the pupils. However, individual case studies in this paper have shown that the sprouting of these independent colleges worsened the decline of the education system. Most parents had withdrawn their children out of formal schools and enrolled them in these colleges that also failed to adequately provide for them. Some of these colleges used an internationally recognised Board of examination, University of Cambridge Local Examination Syndicate. However, this new crop of private colleges offers tuition to even the average classes in society and is sprout across Harare's high density suburbs as well as the city centre. Taking into consideration a number of issues such as school curriculum, examinations, extra-curricular activities, location of schools, special needs education and security, this paper concludes that independent colleges did nothing to rescue the decline of the education system in Zimbabwe during the period under review.

The Education system in Zimbabwe

Education is a fundamental right, it is a means to the fulfilment of an individual as well as the transfer of values from one generation to the next. Education is also critical for the economic growth of a country. Schools remain the basic instruments for the provision of education and any disturbances in the functioning of the school affects the provision of education as well as the future of the children. In Zimbabwe schools are registered with the Ministry of Education, Sports and Culture hence they are known as formal schools. These schools are supposed to use credible syllabi which are again provided by the Ministry. The children are also mandated to wear formal uniforms to school. However, due to the economic destabilisation which started around the early 1990s with the adoption of Economic Structural Adjustment Programmers (ESAP) which led to the devaluation of the dollar and a decline in the standards of living of the general populace, the education sector has witnessed a growth in the number of unregistered independent schools. During the same time political instability grew with the final blow coming from the emergence of the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) in 1997, a formidable competing political party against the ruling ZANU- PF. Political instability led to an imposition of sanctions by western countries resulting in the handicap of the economy. This situation was made worse by the fact that there was a lot of misgovernance and unaccountability in government departments. This political and economic instability led to individuals, businessmen, school teachers opening schools without approval from

the relevant Ministry and as a result they have come to be known as 'colleges' or independent schools that are not formal. These colleges are usually located in the heart of the city or residential homes as well as in church buildings. According to Dr Washington Mbizvo, Higher and Tertiary Education permanent secretary, 'There are 524 registered independent training colleges in the country but thousands had sprouted over the years. Operations of independent colleges have always been mired in controversy.' (The Herald, 13 July 2010). This type of schools has been added to Zimbabwe's education system and has subsequently worsened the rot in the education system in Zimbabwe.

The education system in Zimbabwe is divided into four levels namely, pre-school, primary, secondary and tertiary. However focus will be on secondary education. All these levels fall under the Ministry of Education Sports and Culture in terms of administration and supervision with the exception of tertiary education. Pre-schools fall under the Early Childhood Education and Care program. These schools are owned by the government, individuals or organizations. They are found in both rural and urban areas. In urban areas these pre-schools are mostly run by individuals as private enterprises. Pre-schools cater for children ranging from three to five years. This stage stands as a stepping stone to primary education. Children are taught basic information like colours, shapes, names of animals, numbers as well as interaction with each other. Pre-schools enable the children to socialize and develop as well as fully exploit their capabilities (Flanagan, 2004, p.57).

Primary education is mandatory. The government of Zimbabwe made provision for primary education free for all in both rural and urban areas upon independence. There are primary schools in each and every corner of the country making it easier for all children to attend school. The teacher-pupil ratio in most primary schools in Zimbabwe is one as to thirty. However this number has dwindled significantly as a result of a number of challenges that children face as they progress for example the introduction of school levy among others. In Primary school the child studies from Grade 0 to Grade 7 and gets a certificate after grade 7. Each grade is completed after 1 year. Shona, English, Ndebele, Art, Content and Maths are the main subjects offered at primary level. The curriculum also includes minority languages like Shangani, Tonga and Venda but examinations are not written on these. This also points to a weakness in the education system as it fails to cater for minority languages. Sport is also offered as compulsory physical education embedded within the school curriculum. Moreover, there has been emphasis on Home economics in most primary schools. At the end of Grade seven, pupils sit for an exam which is used as an entrance into secondary school. However since primary education is compulsory and is guided by the policy of unimpeded progress, performance on the Grade seven results does not necessarily affect progression of the students to secondary education (Kanyongo, 2005, p.67). However, some secondary schools are selective and they set selection criteria based on Grade seven examinations.

Secondary level comes as a continuation of primary education. At independence secondary education in Zimbabwe was mostly provided by church affiliated boarding schools but prior to 2000 the most common types of schools were owned by

government, city councils and communities. Secondary school is accessible from all corners of the country as well. A variety of subjects are offered at Secondary school in different syllabi and these are Shona, English, Ndebele, Mathematics, Bible Knowledge, History, Integrated Science, Physics, Biology, Chemistry, Geography, Divinity, Accounts, Technical Drawing, Management of Business, Computers, Fashion and Fabrics, Carpentry, Economics and Agriculture. There is also night school offered in selected schools around the country. Night school is education for the older people who cannot fit into the mainstream education and most of the time they are adults of over 18 years. It is meant to promote adult literacy in the country. Another group of pupils who use night schools are those that are supplementing failed subjects at both 'O' and 'A' levels. Teachers offer extra lessons at a cost to these pupils.

Economic meltdown and decline of the education system

The Second World Congress of Education International meeting held in Washington D C in 1998 affirmed that education is the key instrument to improving the future of children (Mutepfa, 2007, p.4). The Zimbabwean government also put in place policies that ensured the equal provision of education to the girl child upon independence in 1980. This was done by adopting the Education for All policy which eased the problem of inequalities in access to education for girls (Kanyongo, 2005, p. 67). The adoption of such policies showed that the government supported the children's access to education and believed that education was the key in empowering women in society as well as guaranteeing a better future for the country's development. Group studies that offered non-formal secondary education to adults also thrived during this period. These ran day and evening lessons for adults who had failed to go to school as a result of the war situation. These study groups also catered for repeaters who would have failed to get places at formal institutions. There was notable gender equity in Zimbabwean education in the 1980s to 1990s. The enrolment of girls was usually higher than that of boys at primary level. At secondary level, the number of girls and boys enrolled would be almost equal. However, following the decline of the Zimbabwean economy from the late 1990s, it has become an open secret that Zimbabwe's education system is in a state of shock and once again the girl child's future is not secure. Given a choice, under difficult financial constraints, most parents opted to enroll the boy child in school than the girl child.

Although Zimbabwean children are able to access education, they are faced with a number of challenges in school which disturb their education. From 2000 to 2005 most schools owned by government, city councils and churches came close to shutting down, they were left with no adequate teaching staff because of low remuneration and pathetic conditions of service. A degreed secondary school teacher in Zimbabwe earns between \$150 and \$180 monthly at present. According to Precious Gwezere, "a teacher has become a beggar in Harare, given the high rates of rentals, electricity bills and water charges that one has to pay. In 2008 I stopped going to work and resorted to selling tomatoes so that I could buy food for my family." While others who had no passports resorted to selling perishables locally, others in possession of passports engaged in cross border trading bringing in items such as electrical gadgets, blankets and food to sell locally. Some of the teachers spent most of their time on the buses travelling and on the streets selling at the expense of the students. This situation is attributed to the

government's high public expenditure and non transparency in allocation of resources (Masuko, 2003) which has left teachers and other civil servants with paltry salaries that are below the poverty datum line. Teachers have responded to this pathetic situation by moving out of the country for greener pastures to South Africa, Swaziland, Botswana and Lesotho. Comparatively, teachers have recorded the highest number of emigrants from the professional, technical and related workers categories since 2000. According to the Progressive Teachers Union of Zimbabwe secretary General, Raymond Majongwe, 25000 teachers left the country in 2007 alone. In 2008 the figure was much higher as Zimbabwe needed 120 000 teachers at all levels. Although figures given by teacher trade unions might be exaggerated in order for them to attract sympathizers, the point still remains that the education system has been hard hit by brain drain. Unfortunately, the government or rather the Ministry of Education Sports and culture has not published figures of the number of teachers who have left the country following their National Audit on Civil servants done in November to December of 2009. As a result one cannot establish with certainty the correct figure of teachers who have gone away.

Those who have remained have resorted to strikes and go slows and cross border trading and thus offering little or no lessons to pupils. According to Takawira Tevera, 'It was impossible to go and face the pupils on an empty stomach, so I decided that if the government cannot pay me, then I can offer classes at home. 'I teach 'O' and 'A' level candidates in my house during school terms and holidays, charging \$5 an hour on A' Level students' said Mr Tevera. As a result of the low remuneration that teachers were given, most of them resorted to conducting private lessons with students in their homes or in church buildings. Mr Pfumai conducts private lessons with a group of 20 students at a church in Mufakose. Everglade College operates from the Moslem church in the same suburb charging \$20 per month per student. High Hopes College charges \$25 per month for the Junior certificate level while those doing O and A level pay \$30 and \$35 respectively per month. If a teacher managed to get 20 pupils per subject, he or she would earn far much more than his salary. The adoption of extra lessons by the teachers prejudices the underprivileged students because only those who can afford can now learn. Ideally extra lessons are for students with challenges in particular areas, but who are at the same time learning normally during school hours.

Year 2008 marked the peak of Zimbabwe's economic and social woes and the education sector was not spared as all systems collapsed. As a result most schools were left with no money for administration because of the depreciating Zimbabwean dollar and hyperinflation. Schools could not buy teaching materials and books. This was worsened by a drought that hit the country and left both rural and urban areas with no basic foodstuffs and boarding schools could not feed the pupils. Most parents resorted to withdrawing their children from boarding and day schools and enrolling them into the fast growing 'independent colleges' which boasted of trained teaching staff and resources. These 'independent colleges' offered tuition to even the average classes in society.

Location of 'independent colleges'

It has been generally agreed that there is a connection between education and the quality of institution (Masuko, 2003, p.5). Here the quality of institution refers to the availability of teachers, reading and learning material and security of students among others. These aspects offer a better and competitive type of education. However, most of

these private colleges lack the quality that they advertise daily in local newspapers. For instance, most of them are located in the Central Business District (CBD) of Harare where there is a hive of activity, vehicles hooting, vendors and individuals going about their business throughout the day. The best example is Herentals College which is located along Robert Mugabe Way, opposite Rainbow movie house. Another Herentals college is located at Machipisa shopping centre in the high density suburbs of Highfields. The controversial location of these two colleges has created a bad reputation for the college. For example, according to Makunde Martin, in Highfields, the college has come to be known as 'Hurentals' college by the locals. This is a stereotypical name that denotes the promiscuity of the college students especially the girl students. This is mainly because the students are seen roaming around the streets of Harare CBD and Highfields during normal lecture hours and one is left wondering whether they learn at all. Such perceptions emanate from the fact that these colleges do not provide a good learning environment because they are located near areas of entertainment. The students are tempted to go to the movies during class times and their attention is captured by a number of happenings on the streets. According to Temptation Muringisi, a teacher in Highfields, 'When a child hears the bus conductors yelling for passengers outside, they are attracted by the commotion. Children watch passerbys and bus touts canvassing for passengers all day. Children are curious by nature. Therefore one cannot expect quality results at a school where the environment is not conducive for learning.'

Independent colleges in high density areas also show that these schools are unable to offer security to the children especially the girl child. Another case in point is New Horizon Academy located in Budiriro 1. Typically, this college occupies the first floor of a double storey building which is at the heart of the shopping centre. The second floor of the same building houses a night club and the ground floor of the building is a supermarket. Opposite this building is a beer garden which has a lot of activity during the day. In view of the location of this particular college, one realises that these colleges do not offer a serene environment and the owners are not so much concerned with offering quality education but collecting large chunks of money. According to Thabeni T, a teacher in Budiriro, 'A learning environment should be quiet and offer the student time to read and concentrate.' The location puts the girl child's life under threat of abuse as it exposes her to patrons of these clubs. Worse still, sexuality has always been an area of concern affecting female participation in education and girls have been viewed by society as 'hunters of men' (Siyanda, 2003). Given the economic meltdown in the country especially before the dollarization of the economy in 2009, many girls were tempted to exchange sex for cash and some of these colleges were providing a conducive environment for this because of their physical locations. Therefore, as alternatives to formal schools, some of these colleges put the girl child at risk and fail to offer the necessary security for her safety in education. Comparatively most formal schools are situated away from areas of entertainment and even major road networks. This gives both the parent and the pupil a sense of security.

Curriculum

Irrespective of the location on which most of these colleges are, the curriculum that they offer is found wanting in regards to Zimbabwe's education system. The Nziramasanga Commission of inquiry of 1999 simply recommended the continued expansion of education facilities and equal emphasis of practical and technical subjects with other

these colleges advertise in local newspapers and list a number of subjects that they offer at Ordinary and Advanced levels. For example, an advert in the Herald of 25 March 2010 by Trust Academy stipulates that they offer tuition in the following subjects English, Mathematics, Science, Geography, History, Commerce, Accounts, and Economics - a collection of purely academic subjects. The curriculum concentrates on academics only, striving to get the students paid jobs in government or business through secondary and tertiary education (Grol, 2000). A closer analysis of this advert shows that these colleges do not offer technical subjects such as, technical graphics, fashion and fabrics, food and nutrition woodwork, building and metal work. However as a result of the shortage of teachers in formals schools parents were left with no option but to send their children to these colleges despite these limitations. The colleges are therefore not catering for those pupils who are not bright in academics but can do better with technical education. Moreover these colleges are also not operating in line with the recommendations of the Nziramasanga Commission of Inquiry of 1999 which emphasizes on practical subjects.

Technical education has been seen as a tool for servicing the developmental needs of society and many countries including Zimbabwe introduced technical subjects as part of the formal school system. In Zimbabwe, technical education was introduced after independence for the less academically minded pupils (Mupinga, 2005, p.79). These subjects offer pupils a sound background in occupations such as carpentry (Nherera, 1998) and dressmaking which students could take up in life for income generation and sustain their lives. The objectives for building studies include the need to develop a variety of manual skills, become aware of trades and professions in the building industry as well as become aware of the construction technology available and appropriate their environment, design simple buildings and become self reliant and committed to community development.(Mupinga, 2005, p.79). In this way the school curriculum becomes all encompassing and deals away with the myth that school is for competent students only, rather it provides basic skills for income generating projects. This solves the increase in youth unemployment problems in the country. Besides the absence of technical subjects in these colleges' curriculum, most of them do not offer science subjects such as biology, chemistry and physics. This is because they do not have laboratories which are important for carrying out experiments. The curriculum becomes narrowly focused on humanities and commercial subjects and therefore is not all encompassing. Although this narrow focus might be beneficiary to the Zimbabwean economy which has become more commercial as well as boosting the dwindling numbers in the civil service the colleges need to also cater for those who are academically challenged.

Technical education is beneficial to students who are academically challenged because they will resort to self-employment for survival. Viewed from another angle technical education ironically led to a moulding of an African who could self sustaining himself through the work of his hands.

Independent colleges offer computers as a practical subject. This is an advantage especially considering the world in which we now live. The promotion of information technology in schools is one area which has not been moving fast enough in Zimbabwe. The problem is the lack of money to buy the necessary accessories such as computers. In Zimbabwe the situation was made worse by the economic meltdown which has dampened progress in the supply of electricity infrastructure across the country. Most

schools are not electrified and of those that are, there is no internet access which pupils can also use for e-learning purposes. According to Moore, only 1% of Africa's population use basic internet services such as e-mail (Moore, 2001 p.7). In Zimbabwe such services are accessible at the private colleges but it also has to be noted that even at these colleges accessibility is limited.

Credibility of Examinations

The exodus of students from formal schools to private colleges during this period was also a result of loss of credibility and public trust in the local examination board, the Zimbabwe Schools Examination Council (ZIMSEC). This board was created by an Act of Parliament in 1996 in order to administer and manage primary and secondary examinations. Prior to the creation of this board, all the examination were set and marked by the University of Cambridge Local Examination Syndicate (UCLES) in Britain. The board started to function independently in year 2000. The localization of examination helped in cutting costs because the government no longer needed to use foreign currency to process the country's exams and results. Politically, this marked a move from British control and a gain in academic independence. However, this move gave birth to multiple problems which have discredited the local examination board to present.

One of the major challenges facing ZIMSEC today is that of security of examinations. Since 2000 there have been cases of examination leaks and examination dates having to be changed in order to allow time for setting another paper. Security of examination scripts is not guaranteed as examinations continue to be transported by public transport mostly to rural areas. This type of transport exposes the examination and lead to delays in cases of breakdowns and accidents. Moreover the examination scripts can get lost. School officials have cited cases where wrong examination scripts were delivered to wrong candidates and candidates receiving results for examinations they did not sit for. In other cases, candidates failed to receive results for subjects they sat for while schools would receive results belonging to other schools. In 2004, the headmaster and three other teachers at Mnene primary school are reported to have written and filled in answer sheets for most Grade seven pupils. Despite such corruption, the then Permanent Secretary for education, T. K. Tsodzo declared that some of the results at the school would stand as genuine. Such inconsistencies in delivery of services expose the inefficiencies of Zimbabwe's examination system and erode the little confidence that the public still has in the system (Kanyongo, 2005, p.72). As a result, most parents pulled their children out of the formal school system because the students at these schools sit for local examinations. Most independent colleges provided the students with the opportunity to sit for Cambridge examinations which are more credible and internationally recognised.

Provision of extra-curricular activities

Whilst colleges such as Trust academy offer extra-curricular activities like sports in different sporting fields' soccer, cricket, basketball and tennis, most of the mushrooming colleges do not have this on their timetables. This might be attributed to the way sports are generally viewed in the context of education especially in African societies. The society has always believed in the power of academic subjects and even students have

been under pressure from parents and even teachers to improve achievement in core academic subjects. Extra-curricular activities including sports have been sacrificed. As alternative institutions that offer education to Zimbabwean children, these colleges seem to subscribe to this theory of education and continue to view sport as detrimental to a child's education. Some of these colleges congest the student's academic timetable to the extent that they learn on Saturdays. However research has shown that children who play sport actually do better in school and have enhanced social skills. According to Broh, (2002) 'the prevailing educational philosophy is that student development is much more than their intellectual being and that their development emotionally and socially impacts their ability to maximize their intellectual capabilities'. Therefore participating in sport helps students, perform better in school more than any other extra-curricular activity. This is because sports offer the necessary challenges and competitive spirit that can increase a child's self-esteem and academic performance. Enhanced self-esteem is of an advantage even to the girl child in school because it will boost her confidence and her continued stay in school thus sports helps secure the girl's continued education.

Moreover, sport decreases the likelihood of disease and drug abuse and teenage pregnancies in students. If students are involved in sports they will make full use of their leisure time doing something beneficial in terms of both health and social integration. They will not be seen all over the town centre and nearby movie houses and loitering in shopping complexes because they would be occupied. By incorporating sports in school curriculums, students will be helped in managing their time well and avoiding places that tempt them into prostitution or early involvement in sexual activity. Instead they will spend more quality time doing exercise. As the saying goes, 'a healthy body makes a healthy mind.' However, the benefits of sports go way beyond health.

Socially, sports can develop a sense of community in students. They are bonded with new friends and teammates. According to Broh, (2002) sports change the student's peer groups and this decreases peer pressure in drug abuse and other juvenile delinquencies. Moreover, sports allow children the ability to take up leadership roles in society, handle adversity and improve on general time management. Students are able to build relationships with parents and teachers who then act as resources for them in terms of their academic requirements. Although, sport has been viewed as a setback in a child's academic education and there are uncertainties in high school sport, it has also led to a number of success stories, as school sports laid the foundation for sporting careers especially in athletics.

Provision of education to learners with disability

The Secretary for Education, Sports and Culture's directive for inclusive education in Zimbabwe requires schools to provide equal access to education for learners with disabilities (Mutepefa, 2007, p.3). However, since independence children with disabilities have been sidelined and treated like social outcasts as very few of them were integrated into regular schools and the lucky few found their way into schools for the disabled, run by Jairos Jiri and missionaries such as the Dutch reformed owned Copota School for the blind, Morgenster Mission school for the deaf and dumb. In many African countries the education of pupils with special needs began as 'Special Education'. For

example, Mrs. Margaretta Hugo from the Dutch Reformed Church started 'Special Education' by founding the Chivi Mission School for pupils with blindness in Zimbabwe. Government itself has been found wanting in providing the necessary education for the disabled. Most government schools house only blind students and others are left out as there are no required facilities to cater for them. According to Chimedza, (2007) developing countries such as Zimbabwe continue to grapple with terms, concepts and phenomena that imply including people with disabilities in regular schools. As the socio-cultural perspective to disability correctly observes, disability is a social construct and not an objective condition.

The term inclusive education has gained ground in Zimbabwe of late, as the government calls for the inclusion of the disabled students into the regular schools. Recently, at the launch of the Inclusive Education for All Campaign in the capital, Vice President Joyce Mujuru said disabled children should be accommodated in schools with their able bodied counterparts (The Herald, 17 May, 2010). She called on the communities to ensure that children with disabilities get an education to enable them to realize their full potential. However, given the challenges that the education sector was facing in this period, it is most unlikely that this will come to fruition soon. Disabled children fail to continue with their education because of a dearth in user-friendly infrastructure and learning materials. With the decline in Zimbabwe's education system in the period under review, education for the disabled became more inaccessible. Theory has failed to be turned into practice in Zimbabwe mainly because of a combination of a number of reasons which include lack of money, ruthless political corruption and ineffectiveness of policy implementation. Lack of funding in developing countries for example makes it difficult for governments to put into place the necessary facilities for the provision of special needs to disabled students (Zindi, 1997, pp.42-45).

One would have thought that the mushrooming colleges would also inherit the burden of educating the disabled students, after the near collapse of the formal school system and the failure of formal schools to provide adequate special needs education. However, a closer look reveals that most of these colleges also do not offer education to the disabled. Accessibility is mainly barred by the location of these colleges which are housed in storey buildings that are not accessible to wheelchairs and not friendly to the blind. Moreover the fact that they are situated at busy shopping centres and the city centres make them less accessible to the disabled. Therefore, the mere location of most of these colleges physically bar children with special needs to access and compete with able students. Therefore while parents felt it necessary and convenient to move their able children from formal schools into independent, the same alternative was not offered to the disabled. This is despite the fact that their schools were also hard hit by the economic crisis. 'Independent colleges' are not all encompassing because some of them do not cater for these children with disabilities.

Conclusion

This paper concludes that while Zimbabwe has witnessed a significant decline in her education system, the sprouting of 'independent colleges' across the country has not helped the situation. This is mainly because they are also found wanting because they do

not offer a conducive environment to education. Some are sprouting inside homes, churches and in backyards. Houses have been converted to schools but without extra toilets or other amenities. The curriculum that they follow is not all encompassing for it is highly academic and in most cases does not offer extra-curricular activities such as sports. Disabled children are not catered for in most instances and therefore their situation remains pathetic. Most of them are after money. However it will take time before the government can control these schools because of the problems that continue to bedevil the education sector. According to the Minister of Education, Sport and Culture, David Coltart, most of these schools have not obtained the authority to operate and the dangers of this development are that standards will not improve. However, given the present economic situation, the government will not be able to deal with the situation as most government inspectors that are tasked to monitor these schools do not have access to transportation. Therefore they fail to visit all the new schools to ensure the safety of the children. In July 2010, the government was able to revoke licenses for 32 private colleges and to shut down 74 colleges after they failed to comply with the law (The Herald, 13 July 2010). The mushrooming private colleges does not offer any alternative to the formal school system in Zimbabwe until the government monitors these schools activities. Meanwhile, the education system in Zimbabwe continues to be compromised.

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