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**Initiating University Reform: Experience from Sub-Saharan Africa**

**William S. Saint**

**Quantitative Developments, Quality and Equity Concerns in  
Zimbabwean Primary and Secondary Education Sectors**

**L.M. Nyagura**

**Curriculum Implementation in Mathematics Classrooms in  
Zimbabwean Secondary Schools**

**Gail Jaji**

**Attitudes Towards Science: An Exploratory survey of pupils  
Preparing for National Examinations**

**Overson Shumba**

**Student Teachers' Perceptions of And Attitudes Towards Teaching  
Practice: Deployment in Zimbabwe**

**P.Siyakwazi and V. Nyawaranda**

# Quantitative Developments, Quality and Equity Concerns in Zimbabwean Primary and Secondary Education Sectors

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## *Abstract*

*Whilst Zimbabwe has achieved significant quantitative developments in education, little has been achieved in providing equal access to quality education in the whole education sector. The poor communities continue to struggle on with poor teacher quality, inadequate instructional materials, and poor school facilities. Gender discrimination is on the increase with less female students attending school and with more of this small group dropping out of school. The quality of education has significantly declined and this signals a serious potential problem of high illiteracy levels, especially among women.*

## **Introduction**

At independence in 1980, the Government of Zimbabwe initiated major expansion of the education sector at all levels. The main goal of the expansion was to fulfil political promises to transform an elitist, and racially and socially biased educational system to one that would provide universal access to education and training. The main sectoral objectives were to expand enrolment at the primary and secondary education levels, especially in those areas previously neglected by colonial regimes; to train more teachers for both primary and secondary schools; to diversify and modernize secondary and tertiary vocational and technical training programmes; to provide universal primary education; to abolish the colonial racial education system and establish a uniform national system, and to establish at least one government school in each of the rural administrative districts.

Expansion of the education system required substantial resources in order to construct new facilities, replace war-damaged buildings, supply teaching and learning materials and train thousands of teachers. Cost-effective and efficient support systems had to be established centrally, regionally and in districts to provide basic management capacity for the rapidly growing education system. Significant quantitative developments have been made towards achieving the overall education sectoral objectives.

This study has two main objectives, namely to assess the extent of access to quality primary and secondary education, and to determine quality and equity issues in primary and secondary education.

## **Primary Education**

### **Quantitative Growth of Primary Education**

Enrolments in primary school have steadily increased since 1980. At independence in 1980 there were 1,235,994 pupils registered in primary schools. This number rose to 2,281,595 pupils in 1990, an increase of 84.6 percent. This represents an annual average growth rate of 8.5 percent (see Table 1)

**Table 1**  
**Student Enrolments by Education Level (1980 - 1990)**

LEVEL/YEAR	1980	1983	1985	1987	1989	1990
PRIMARY	1235994	204487	2216878	2251319	2274178	2281595
SECONDARY	74321	316438	482000	604652	695882	708080
TECHNICAL	3642	7791	14410	11959	10715	9403
TEACHER						
TRAINING	2824	8429	10032	13294	16231	16576
UNIVERSITY	2240	3620	4742	6873	9289	9300

Source: Ministries of Education (Zimbabwe) and University of Zimbabwe Statistical Records. (1980-1990).

Over the same period, the number of primary schools increased from 3,161 in 1980 to 4,530 in 1990, an increase of 43.3 percent or an annual average growth rate of 4.3 percent. During the same period, the number of primary school teachers increased from 28,455 in 1980 to 59,468 in 1990, an increase of 109 percent. The increase in the number of teachers reduced the teacher-pupil ratio from 1:43.4 in 1980 to 1:38.4 in 1990. However, teacher quality significantly declined. There were approximately 28 percent untrained teachers in 1980 compared to about 49 percent in 1990. Figure 1 (Appendix A) portrays the statistical balance between trained and untrained primary school teachers for the period 1980-1990.

The enrolment in primary schools as a percentage of the 6 - 12 year age group sharply rose from 83 percent in 1980 to 124 percent in 1985 and then dropped to 107 percent in 1989. In terms of gender, the participation rate of girls in primary education stands at about 49 percent. There is, however, a higher dropout rate for girls particularly in the rural areas and this varies considerably across the regions and across districts in regions. The gender differential increases when pupils proceed to secondary education (see Table 2). Another contributing factor for the increase is that girls' achievement in Grade 7 national examination is significantly lower than that for boys.

**Table 2**  
**Transition Rates (%) From Primary to Secondary**  
**Schools, 1980 - 1988**

Year Into Form 1:	1980	1981	1982	1984	1985	1986	1987	1988
Transition Rate (%):								
Boys	26	89	79	85	84	81	73	69
Girls	28	82	60	79	79	76	67	62
Combined	26	86	70	82	82	78	70	66

Source: Calculated from Ministry of Education and Culture Statistics

While the transition rates for boys and girls have stabilized around 69 percent and 62 percent respectively, the current economic hardships together with cultural practices which tend to value boys more than girls will undoubtedly further exacerbate the gender differential, particularly in grades 6 and 7 and in secondary education. Figure 2 (Appendix A) illustrates the gender differential in primary education for the period 1980 - 1990.

### **Quality of Primary Education**

Quality of primary education in Zimbabwe is dependent on school type. Based on geographical and responsible authority, primary schools in Zimbabwe can be categorized into the following school types:

- (i) former group A government schools located in low density urban areas which previously catered for the European (white, asian and coloured) population,
- (ii) former group B government schools located in high density urban areas and previously catered for the urban African (black) population,

(iii) private high fee paying or trust schools which previously catered for the more affluent segment of the white population,

(iv) low fee paying schools which are mostly non-government urban schools, and

(v) rural district community schools which cater for the economically and socially disadvantaged rural and farming African (black) segment of the population constituting about 70 percent of the national population.

At the national level, the overall quality of student performance in grade 7 examinations has declined since 1988 when the proportion of successful candidates dropped significantly compared to previous years. Table A1 (Appendix A) presents an aggregate analysis of 1984 to 1989 grade 7 examination results for English and Mathematics.

The analysis of the English results in Table A1 (Appendix A) shows that the overall pass rate has declined 22 percent since 1984; the percentage of high pass grades has declined 15 percent and that of the exceptional pass grade has dropped from 7.4 percent in 1984 to 1.9 percent in 1989. Results in Mathematics are comparable. The overall pass rate declined 17 percent since 1984 whilst high pass grades dropped 14 percent and the exceptional pass grade declined 6 percent. Based on school types, former group A and private high fee paying schools produce better results than former group B and low fee paying schools which in turn produce better results than rural district community schools (Nyagura, 1991a).

Differences in the quality of primary education across school types is attributable to between - school differences, between-class variation, and within-school or between-student variation. In particular, differences in resource availability between school types are pronounced and vary in quantity and types of materials. High fee paying schools and former group A schools have adequate provisions of textbooks, library books, classroom and administration facilities, instructional guides, pens and pencils, chalk and paper, maps and charts, and dictionaries. On the other extreme, rural district community schools are seriously constrained by shortages of

classrooms, classroom furniture and qualified teachers; insufficient textbooks, pens and pencils, chalk and paper; inadequate or even no administration facilities such as telephone, office, staff room, typewriters, file cabinets, school vehicle and duplicating machine. In addition, rural community primary schools have more dropouts, oldest pupils, poor teacher accommodation, high teacher-pupil ratios, heavy teaching loads, and poorly educated parents in communities where the schools are situated (Nyagura, 1991b).

Research evidence (Nyagura, 1991a & 1991b; Ross & Postlethwaite, 1991) shows that primary schools with a high percentage of trained teachers, a good textbook availability (one textbook per pupil), a well equipped library, young pupils (under 13 years at grade 7 level), and professionally committed school heads produce high academic results in grade 7 examinations. Evidence from the same studies (Nyagura, 1991b) shows that schools headed by female heads are more effective than those run by male heads, and that single-sex schools have a powerful and positive effect on the education of girls compared to co-educational schools. On the other hand, there is little research evidence to show that primary schools in Zimbabwe are differentially effective for students on the basis of gender, home language, class size, streaming, school shifts, teaching experience, and teacher retention.

## **Secondary Education**

### **Quantitative Growth in Secondary Education**

Dramatic developments have taken place in secondary education since independence in 1980. The small figure of 74321 students in 1980 rose to 708080 in 1990, reflecting a phenomenal increase of 852.7 percent (see Table 1). The phenomenal increases in enrolments were made possible by school construction efforts by rural communities with some assistance from government, and by accepting lower teacher qualifications.

Enrolment statistics by gender show that the overall proportion of girls in secondary school remained constant at about 42 percent. However, at

senior secondary levels the proportion of girls to boys has declined since 1979. Tables A2 and A3 (Appendix A) depict this situation for the period 1979-1989 at Form 4 and Form 6 levels, respectively.

The proportion of girls at Form 4 level has decreased from 43 percent in 1979 to 39.8 percent in 1989. At Form 6 level the proportion of girls has decreased from 35 percent in 1979 to 29 percent in 1989. High school fees and increasing dropout rates are major factors for the decrease in the number of girls in secondary education. The gender differential can further be illustrated by transition rates from Form 4 to Form 5. See Table 3.

### Table 3

#### Dropout and Transition Rates (%) in Zimbabwe Secondary Schools, 1982 - 1989

YEAR:	1982	1983	1984	1985	1986	1987	1988	1989
<b>DROPOUT RATES:</b>								
Form 1 to 4	3.0	4.6	5.7	3.9	5.0	9.0	12.8	11.1
Male	1.5	3.2	3.8	1.5	2.4	8.0	10.7	9.2
Female	5.0	6.7	8.4	7.5	8.8	10.4	15.7	13.6
<b>TRANSITION RATES:</b>								
Form 4 to 5	14.9	8.9	4.5	3.8	6.4	5.6	7.0	6.6
Male	14.8	9.1	3.9	3.7	7.4	6.2	8.0	7.5
Female	15.1	8.7	5.1	4.0	4.9	4.7	5.5	5.1

Source: Calculated from Ministry of Education and Culture Statistics.

The data presented in Tables A2 and A3 (Appendix A) and Table 3 clearly show that girls have been disadvantaged in access to higher educational opportunities despite government's policy to eliminate gender inequalities in education. In fact, this disadvantage continues to tertiary education. The gender differential is characterized by fewer girls proceeding to secondary school, fewer girls proceeding from one level to



the next within secondary school, and large numbers of girls dropping out of the school system. This state of affairs reflects a waste of valuable human resources and signals a critical problem which will hamper the total development of Zimbabwe socially, culturally, politically and economically.

In order to accommodate the large numbers of students in secondary education; more schools had to be built especially in rural areas and cost-effective strategies had to be devised for using schools in urban areas. The number of secondary schools increased from 197 in 1980 to 1512 in 1990. Government schools in high density urban areas instituted double shifts. The rapid increase in students and schools led to some critical problems. First, limited financial resources made it difficult to provide adequate support services and equipment, especially in science and technical subjects. Second, there has been a severe shortage of textbooks and other essential learning materials. Third, it proved difficult to staff the emergent secondary schools with qualified trained teachers. All these factors have had a negative effect on the quality of secondary education.

In 1980 there were 3736 secondary school teachers employed in 197 secondary schools giving an average of about 19 teachers per school and also giving an average teacher-pupil ratio of 1 to 19.9. The number of teachers increased to 27967 in 1990. This gives an average of 18.5 teachers per school and an average teacher-pupil ratio of 1 to 25.3. Thus secondary school teachers had to deal with increased classroom responsibilities under diminishing learning resources and inadequate quality support services. The problem was compounded by the poor teacher quality that resulted due to the rapid expansion of the secondary education sector.

In 1981 the demand for secondary school teachers forced the Ministry of Education and Culture to open the secondary teaching service to primary school trained teachers, untrained teachers and even underqualified teachers. By 1988 secondary school teachers with university education numbered only 13 percent of the total teaching force of 23899 while trained non-graduate teachers numbered 37.5 percent, teacher trainees numbered 9.5 percent, and untrained and underqualified teachers numbered 40 percent. Despite government policy of equitable

distribution of teacher quality across the different school types, serious disparities still exist in the distribution of human resources. First, the already advantaged government and nongovernment urban schools have continued to get most of the trained teachers. Second, the deployment of teachers within schools across different form levels lacks professional objectivity. Third, there is limited teacher support services for both trained and untrained teachers.

### Quality of Secondary Education

The phenomenal expansion in secondary education and the huge financial inputs into education have not been matched by satisfactory outcomes. The quality of secondary education has continued to decline since independence in 1980. Table 4 provides supporting evidence for this observation.

**Table 4**  
**Percentage and Number of Students Achieving Passes**  
**in Five or More Subjects in the 'O' Level Examinations,**  
**1980 - 1988**

Year	Number of Candidates	% Achieving Five + Passes	Number of Students
1980	6012	66.6	4008
1981	10396	57.1	5932
1982	13733	59.2	8134
1983	21733	54.6	11872
1984	73724	20.6	15159
1985	112881	13.0	14760
1986	127265	11.4	14566
1987	152181	11.9	18124
1988	183753	12.4	22786

Source: Zimbabwe Ministry of Education and Culture Statistics, 1980 - 1988.

Table 4 shows that the pass rate in the 'O' level examinations has declined from about 67 percent in 1980 to about 12 percent in 1988.

The decline in the quality of secondary education is attributable to a number of factors. First, the increase in access to secondary education allowed students of low academic ability to enter secondary school whilst the academically designed curriculum remained unchanged. Second, critical shortages of qualified teachers, textbooks, exercise books, school furniture, laboratory and workshop equipment, and library books have adversely affected the effectiveness of secondary schools. Third, teacher stability and retention in schools are seriously affected by poor conditions of service, especially in the poorly resourced schools. Fourth, supervision is totally inadequate due to critical shortages of personnel, funds and transport. Fifth, curriculum implementation is textbook driven despite the fact that textbooks are very scarce in many secondary schools.

Research on school quality and school effectiveness in secondary education in Zimbabwe (Riddell, 1988; Riddell and Nyagura, 1991; Nyagura, 1991; Jaji, 1990; Nyagura and Reece, 1989, 1990a, 1990b) has revealed significant differences in the quality of education across the following school types:

- (i) former group A government schools located in low density urban areas,
- (ii) former group B government schools located in high density urban areas,
- (iii) high fee paying or trust schools,
- (iv) rural group B government schools,
- (v) medium fee paying or mission schools, and
- (vi) rural district council schools which were established after independence in 1980 and cater for the economically and socially deprived 70 percent of the Zimbabwean population.

Research evidence shows that high fee paying schools are on average more effective than the other types of secondary schools, and that former group A schools are as effective as mission schools but are more effective than rural group B and former group B urban government schools, and rural district council schools. However, rural district council secondary schools produce the poorest academic results.

Differences in the quality of education across school types are due to inequitable distribution of teacher quality, inequitable distribution of funds and learning materials, high teacher turnover in the poor schools, and non-supportive school and community environments especially in rural areas which support 65 percent of secondary schools in Zimbabwe. High fee paying schools, former group A and B schools, and mission schools are better resourced than rural district schools. The latter are characterized by inadequate learning resources, less qualified teachers (about 70 percent lack professional training), high staff turnover, oldest students with low pass grades in grade 7 examinations, and the least conducive social and academic environments. Nyagura and Riddell (1991) found that examination results are better in schools with a high percentage of trained teachers, with a good supply of textbooks, and with a high teacher retention. These attributes describe high fee paying and mission secondary schools.

## **Teacher Education**

The steady increase in numbers of teachers in both primary and secondary schools had a negative side to it, namely the increase in the number of untrained and unqualified teachers. To correct this situation, more teachers' colleges were built and large numbers of students were recruited for training. Teacher education enrolments sharply increased from 2824 students in 1980 to 16576 students in 1990, an increase of 487 percent. The number of training colleges increased from 7 in 1980 to 14 in 1990. A fifteenth teachers' technical college with a total capacity of 2000 students was opened in 1991. Of the fifteen teachers' colleges, seven are government primary teachers' colleges, three are church run primary teachers' colleges, and five are government secondary teachers' colleges.

There are fewer female students in both primary and secondary teacher training programmes. Of the 10374 trainees in all primary teachers' colleges in 1990, 46.6 percent were female. In the secondary training sector, 39.7 percent of 6202 trainees registered in 1990 were female. In 1990 lecturer - student ratios were 1 to 26.7 in primary teachers' colleges and 1 to 18.7 in secondary teachers' colleges.

Significant gender differentials exist even among the lecturing staff. Of the 332 lecturers employed in 4 secondary teachers' colleges in 1990 only 95 (28.6%) were female. In primary teachers' colleges during the same year, only 110 (28.4%) female lecturers compared to 278 (71.6%) male lecturers were employed.

### **Financing of Primary and Secondary Education**

The quantitative expansion of primary and secondary education has been achieved through a collaborative effort of both government and private financing. The distribution of schools by responsible authority shows that in secondary education only 15 percent of secondary schools come under the direct control of government while 65 percent are under district and rural councils, 15 percent are mission schools, and five percent are trust schools. The pattern is similar for primary schools. In all school types, parents pay a considerable portion of the total educational costs. Table 5 illustrates the sharing of educational expenses between government and parents in secondary education.

**Table 5**  
**Expenditure Per Secondary Day Pupil By School Type,**  
**1989**

SCHOOL TYPE	TOTAL PER PUPIL Z\$	PARENT'S SHARE(%)	GOVT'S SHARE(%)
Government			
Group A Urban	1427	42.7	57.3
Government			
Group B Urban	800	49.0	51.0
Trust (High Fee)	5197	87.3	12.7
Mission	1456	62.9	37.1
Council	652	53.5	46.5

Source: World Bank Review, 1990

The dramatic expansion in primary and secondary schools meant huge increases in public recurrent expenditure on education. In the 1987/88 fiscal year, the recurrent budget for the Ministry of Education and Culture was Z\$708,851 million. This allocation increased to

Z\$1 329,074 million in the 1990/91 fiscal year, an increase of 27.5 percent which represents an annual average growth rate of about 9.2 percent. This rate of growth has been reduced by the implementation of the cost recovery scheme in 1992. About 90 percent of the recurrent budget for the Ministry of Education and Culture is for salaries of all education personnel in both primary and secondary education sectors. It must be noted that Zimbabwe spends about 10 percent of its gross domestic product on the education sector.

The introduction of the cost-recovery policy in January 1992 has imposed serious economic demands on poor parents who are not only struggling to survive but are now also struggling to keep their children in school. This imposed financial constraint is leading to increased dropouts, especially among girls.

## **Quality Concerns in Primary and Secondary Education**

The quantitative expansion in the education sector was not matched by qualitative efforts. In the school system, particularly in the secondary school, the curriculum retained the colonial norms and values which are alien to the majority of Zimbabwean students. To rectify this anomaly, the Ministry of Education and Culture established the Curriculum Development Unit (CDU) whose main responsibilities are to make the secondary school curriculum more relevant to the economic and cultural needs of Zimbabwe, to conduct research and train school personnel so as to improve the quality of curriculum implementation, and to produce and approve teaching and learning materials for schools. Much work still needs to be done for CDU to have a measurable positive impact on the education system.

The quality of teaching and learning has been adversely affected by shortages of resources. The education system has expanded rapidly that it has been difficult to staff all schools with trained teachers. The system has failed to retain the experienced qualified personnel because of poor salaries and conditions of service. Shortages of textbooks, workshop and laboratory equipment, classrooms and furniture, teachers' accommodation, exercise books and other instructional materials, and funds have contributed to the decline of the quality of education. In addition, teacher support services are totally inadequate due to a shortage of funds, personnel and transport.

## **Equity concerns in Primary and Secondary Education**

Despite impressive increases in enrolments during the period 1980 - 1990, Zimbabwe has not yet achieved equitable access in the learning process and in outcome. Great disparities still exist in access to quality education due to unequal distribution of teacher quality and instructional materials, and due to variations in the quality of school facilities. Primary and secondary education is of poor quality in rural and farming areas compared to that in urban and mission schools.

Gender discrimination is on the increase with less female students attending school and with more of this small group dropping out of school. The consequences of this phenomenon on national development are clear; negative impact on the status of women, reduced impact on child health and nutrition, negative impact on females' attitude to modernity, a substantial rise in the illiteracy levels of women, and unequal distribution of economic benefits to both sexes. During economic hardships, especially since the cost of education has gone up, girls are victims of their parents' poverty and cultural practices which place more value on boys than on girls. To redress the gender discrimination, effective policies on the education of females are needed.

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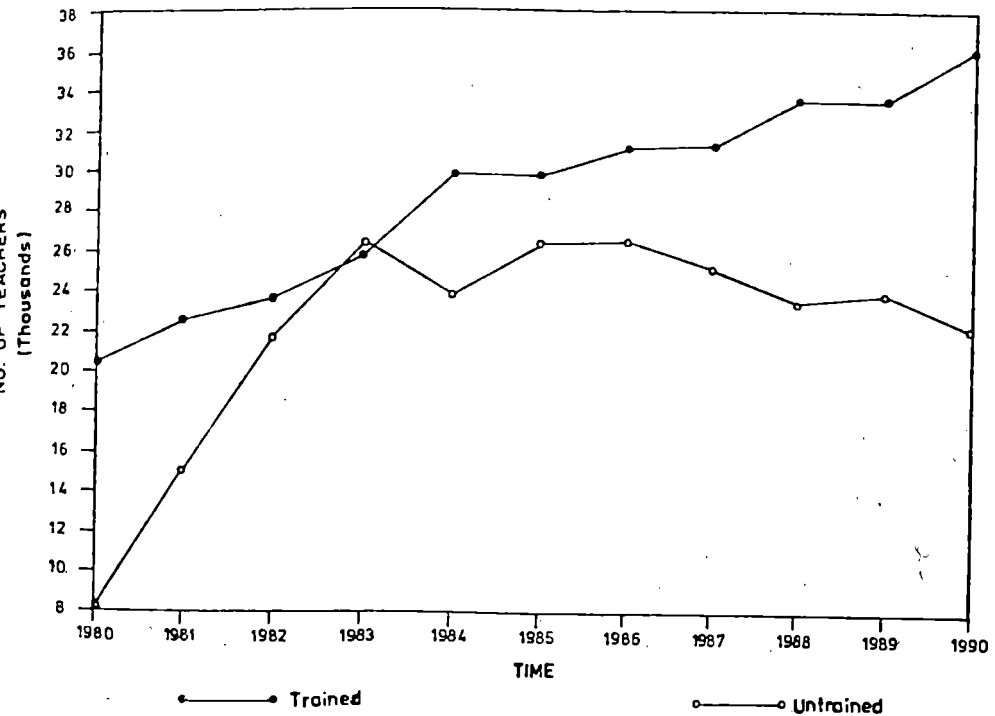
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Appendix A

FIGURE 1

TOTAL NUMBER OF PRIMARY TEACHERS 1980 - 1990



Source: Ministry of Education and Culture.

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Table A1 : Grade Seven : Examination Results

## Grade Seven Examination Results, 1984 - 1989

## (1) English Grades as Percent of 13-year-olds, Grade 7 Students and Candidates

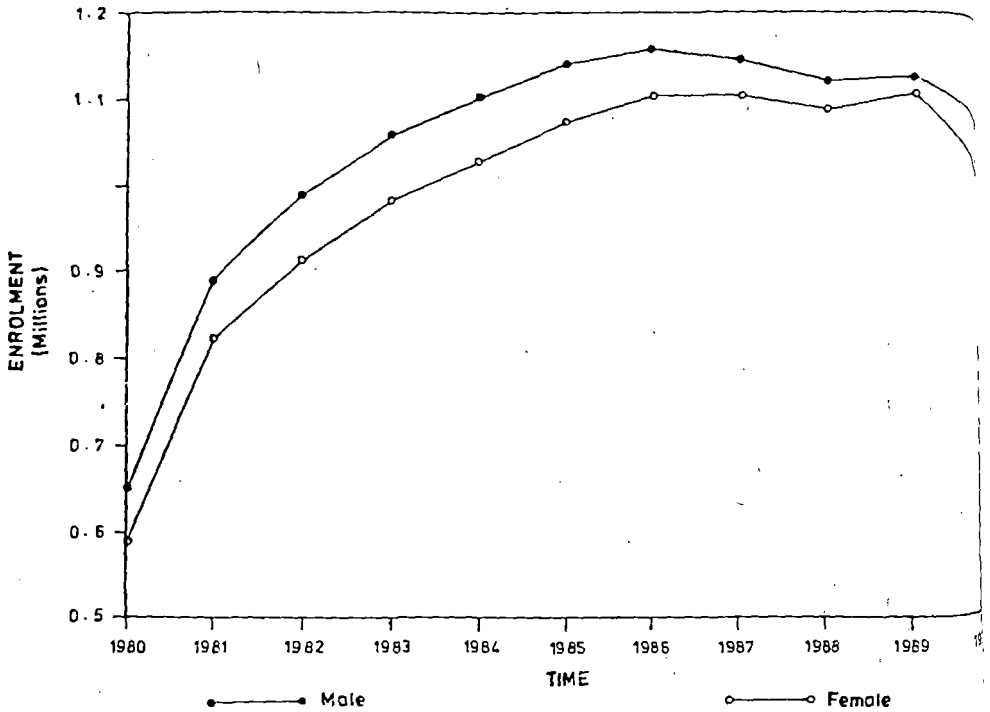
Year	Total Candidates	Pass (Grades 1 - 6) As Percentage of		Candidates	High Pass (Grades 1 - 3) As Percentage of		Candidates	Exceptional Pass (Grade 1) As Percentage of		Candidates
		Age 13	Grade 7		Age 13	Grade 7		Age 13	Grade 7	
1984	190 330	72.8%	81.8%	82.2%	26.5%	31.4%	29.9%	5.6%	7.8%	7.4%
1985	211 279	74.7%	86.2%	79.7%	22.4%	23.8%	23.9%	1.7%	1.9%	1.8%
1986	274 761	90.2%	75.0%	77.7%	19.6%	16.0%	16.8%	1.1%	0.9%	0.9%
1987	305 402	100.4%	77.7%	81.6%	29.2%	22.2%	23.7%	2.0%	1.5%	1.6%
1988	322 108	64.2%	58.2%	50.4%	9.2%	7.6%	7.2%	0.1%	0.1%	0.1%
1989	320 809	75.3%	68.9%	60.6%	17.5%	16.0%	14.0%	2.3%	22.1%	1.9%

## (2) Mathematics Grades as a percentage of 13-year-olds, Grade 7 Students and Candidates

Year	Total Candidates	Pass (Grades 1 - 6) As Percentage of		Candidates	High Pass (Grades 1 - 3) As Percentage of		Candidates	Exceptional Pass (Grade 1) As Percentage of		Candidates
		Age 13	Grade 7		Age 13	Grade 7		Age 13	Grade 7	
1984	190 330	68.9%	81.8%	77.8%	28.7%	34.1%	32.4%	8.2%	9.7%	9.2%
1985	211 459	81.8%	86.2%	86.5%	44.8%	47.6%	47.8%	7.1%	7.6%	7.6%
1986	274 803	91.5%	75.0%	78.8%	44.3%	33.1%	34.7%	7.6%	6.3%	6.6%
1987	305 562	102.1%	77.7%	82.9%	55.0%	41.9%	44.6%	17.1%	13.1%	13.9%
1988	321 264	70.2%	58.2%	55.3%	29.9%	24.8%	23.5%	5.9%	4.9%	4.6%
1989	318 733	75.3%	68.9%	60.9%	22.5%	20.6%	18.2%	3.8%	3.5%	3.1%

Source:

Annual reports of the Secretary for Education, 1984-1987; and Unpublished Ministry of Education and Culture, data, 1985 and 1989.  
In World Bank, Zimbabwe: A Review of Primary and Secondary Education 1990

**FIGURE 2****ENROLMENTS ACCORDING TO SEX: PRIMARY 1980 - 1990**

Source: Ministry of Education and Culture

**Table A2**  
**Form 4 Enrolment Trends by Gender, 1979-1989**

Year	Boys %	Girls %	Total Enrolment N
1979	57.0	43.0	12 201
1980	57.0	43.0	12 811
1981	56.5	43.5	15 323
1982	58.7	41.3	15 772
1983	57.4	42.6	24 509
1984	62.0	38.0	71 014
1985	62.0	38.0	89 517
1986	62.0	38.0	97 820
1987	61.0	39.0	113 915
1988	61.0	39.0	112 865
1989	61.2	38.8	117 061

**Source:** Zimbabwe Government, Annual Reports of the Secretary for Education, 1979-1989. Harare: Government Printer

**Table A3**  
**Form 6 Enrolment Trends by Gender, 1979-1989**

Year	Boys %	Girls %	Total Enrolment N
1979	65.0	35.0	1 067
1980	71.0	29.0	1 413
1981	70.0	30.0	1 673
1982	70.0	30.0	1 729
1983	67.6	32.4	2 890
1984	73.6	26.4	2 911
1985	72.8	27.2	3 281
1986	75.8	24.2	5 258
1987	69.0	31.0	5 966
1988	74.0	26.0	6 186
1989	71.0	29.0	6 959

**Source:** Zimbabwe Government, Annual Reports of the Secretary for Education, 1979-1989. Harare: Government Printer.



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