

AN INVESTIGATION INTO THE CONTRIBUTION OF PRIVATE COLLEGES TO THE PROVISION OF EDUCATION IN ZIMBABWE'S SECONDARY SCHOOL- SECTOR LEARNER'S ATTRIBUTIONS

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ABSTRACT: Demand for education in most developing countries (Zimbabwe included) is very high whereas the corresponding supply is low. Since education is a public service it inevitably implies that governments should wholly provide this service to all citizens who require it. However, due to financial constraints, the governments are unable to meet the educational demands for their populations. This, therefore, gives private players the chance to augment the efforts of the governments. The study was carried out in Harare Province. The study draws on a quantitative inquiry on the role played by private players in the provision of secondary education in Zimbabwe. A total of 200 respondents were used of which 110 were female and 90 were male. These were students enrolled by the four colleges that were sampled for the study. The study revealed that the teacher-pupil ratio was higher than that stipulated by regulations, most students enrolled for less than five subjects, there was shortage of textbooks, there was little participation in sports, teachers were not competent in most subject areas and most pupils were dissatisfied with the education they were receiving from these colleges. The study recommends that the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education should closely monitor the operations of private colleges so as to ensure that they adhere to regulations regarding minimum standards on provision of secondary education. Teachers in private colleges should attend in-service courses to help them with their professional conduct.

KEYWORDS: Private colleges, Province, Secondary education, Students, Developing countries.

INTRODUCTION

According to Komba and Yohana (2013) education is recognised as the foundation of societies' economic developments as it facilitates the acquisition of the skills and attitudes necessary to facilitate innovation and hence raises national productivity. Education is the most powerful catalyst for poverty reduction and similarly, educational deprivation is equally a powerful cause of poverty (Yohana 2013; Rose et. al 2008; Avenstrup 2006; Shi and Quheng, 2007). Therefore, the importance of education to any nation dictates that governments cannot escape their responsibility of educating their citizens (Komba and Yohana 2013). However, the reality on the ground reveals that governments do not have adequate financial resources to wholly fund education provision for their citizenry, thus the involvement of the private players (Pessoa, 2008).

In Zimbabwe, the involvement of private colleges in the provision of secondary education is prescribed in Section 54 of The Education Act (1996) which stipulates that the operation of private colleges involves the offering of tuition only to students who would have completed the prescribed primary education period or would have attained the age of sixteen years whichever comes first (Bowora, 2008). As a result of this legal provision for the establishment of private colleges, a number of individuals and organisations have opened secondary schools across the country to accommodate those students who fail to get places at formal schools due to a number of reasons (Mpofu, 2010). It is on account of this information that

this study set out to investigate the way how private colleges conduct their business in their quest to provide secondary education to their students.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Private schools, also known as independent schools or non-state schools, are not administered by local, state or national governments, thus, they retain the right to select their students and are funded in whole or in part by charging their students tuition, rather than relying on mandatory taxation through public funding (Hein 2004). In the United Kingdom and several other commonwealth countries including Australia and Canada, the use of the term is generally restricted to primary and secondary educational levels (Mpofu 2010). Private education in North America covers the whole gamut of educational activity, ranging from pre-school to tertiary level institutions (Hein 2004). As Burns (2010) observes, most developing world countries follow either the United Kingdom model or the North American model on their private school structure.

In Zimbabwe as Bowora (2009) posits, private colleges were initially a phenomenon associated with rich people in the central business districts of major towns and cities. However, currently, private colleges have mushroomed in high density residential areas. Some of these colleges operate in unsuitable sites for educational business (Magura, 2010). As a result of the high number of these private colleges all over the towns, they are now under the spotlight (Dhliwayo, 2009). As Maponga (2001) observes since 2000, there has been a general decline in the quality of service offered by the mainstream educational system. Private colleges have been established as a result of the deterioration in public education standards due to a number of factors which include general economic decline, brain drain, lack of motivation amongst teachers among other factors (Sisimayi, 2008).

Shumba (2008) applauded private colleges for offering education services to a number of children who could not be accommodated in the government and council run schools because of overcrowding. The nation should not overlook the service provided by private colleges during 2008 when the mainstream education system was faced by total collapse (Mhunga, 2009).

However, as Dube (2009) found out, the Zimbabwe Child Rights activists are accusing these private colleges of profiteering as desperate parents lose patience with strikes by disgruntled teachers and the plummeting standards in government schools. According to Mhandu (2010) some private colleges have children learning in overcrowded conditions. In some cases, children as young as twelve years are exposed to adults as there is no age limit because most of the private colleges operate from rented premises, there is little or no long term investment which the owners put in place (Munyoro, 2010). This implies that their operations would be on makeshift bases hence they end up short-changing the students. As Bowora (2009) observed, equipment for laboratories is usually not acquired, textbooks are usually in short supply and permanent developments like the construction of additional classrooms and administration offices are often not done.

According to Ahmed (2013) in the Northern Nigerian town of Kano, over 80 private nurseries, primary and secondary schools were shut down in 2013 alone and a further, 52 suspended for violating Kano State's education law. Ahmed (2013) quotes Baba Abubakar Umar, the chairman of the Kano State Task Force on Private Schools who stated that, "the situation is quite pathetic; so many schools are operating without government consent, by extension without any kind of formal approval from the Ministry of Education. For example, some private schools are located near sites that negatively affect pupil behaviour-like under high tension cables, or near market places. Hajia Tabawa Abdusalam, the owner of Badar Primary School and Secondary School and the chairperson of the National Association of Proprietors of Private Schools in Kano as quoted by Ahmed (2013) said we are running private schools in Kano State, but some of us are not following the guidelines and the rules for operating a private school. These standards have to do with the teaching and learning environment, qualification of teachers, and the proprietor must have the quality to administer a private school (Ahmed, 2013).

According to Burns (2010), most of the students who learn in community and non-formal colleges possess some characteristics which are negatively associated with education. Such students include those who work as baby minders or domestic workers, part-time students without good results as well as those who struggle financially (Burns, 2010). To this end, the weaknesses which they possess negatively affect their preparedness to learn. With these students in the same class with other students who are not as disadvantaged as them would in turn affect the performance of these others.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The study sought to investigate the role played by private colleges in the provision of secondary school education in Zimbabwe. Mainstream secondary schools cannot accommodate all the children who want to pursue their secondary school

studies, as a result private schools have mushroomed all over the country to fill that gap. There is need, therefore to investigate what actually takes place in these colleges.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The study sought to investigate the role played by private colleges in the provision of secondary school education for those children who cannot be accommodated in mainstream secondary schools.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The study sought to provide answers to the following research questions:

1. What are the general class sizes obtaining in private colleges?
2. Is the location of the private colleges conducive for effective learning?
3. How does the curriculum offered by private colleges look like?
4. Are there adequate learning materials availed for students in the private colleges?
5. Are teachers properly qualified for teaching various subjects in the colleges?

SIGNIFICANCE OF STUDY

The importance of the study stemmed from the fact that it sought to explore the role played by private colleges in the provision of secondary school education. It was hoped that the research would contribute immensely towards a better understanding of the operations of private colleges. There have been mixed perceptions on whether the private colleges are positively contributing to quality education in Zimbabwe or not. The study is likely to provide critical information to governments, policy-makers, non-governmental organisations, donors, communities, parents and other key stakeholders.

LIMITATION OF THE STUDY

Administrators of private colleges would not naturally want a study of this nature carried out in their colleges because of the sensitive nature of the subject. Secondly, in view of the small size of sample and sub-samples used, the findings of this study therefore will have limited generalizability. It has to be pointed out that attitudes about an issue are essentially subjective and cannot be measured accurately. In other words, attitudes have no universally recognised and accepted scales of measurement, and measures that were used in this study cannot be considered to be very accurate.

DELIMITATION OF THE STUDY

The study was confined to one province; which is Harare Province, which also houses Zimbabwe's capital city. It was concerned with the role played by private colleges in the provision of secondary education. The respondents were pupils learning at the private colleges. Teachers, parents and government were outside the purview of this study.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study employed quantitative methodology. Quantitative research was chosen for its ability to enable this study's findings to be generalised to other provinces in the country (Dlumberg, 2008). The quantitative methodology was also found useful in this study because it enabled the researchers to investigate 200 pupils' perceptions on the role private colleges play towards the provision of secondary education.

The study settled for the survey research design. The use of survey research design enabled the researchers to gather widespread perceptions of respondents in regard to the studied phenomenon (Lawson and Lovell 2010). The study used simple random sampling and purposive sampling to select 200 students. The researchers used a questionnaire with closed-ended questions. Close-ended questions enabled the researchers to collect predetermined respondents opinions regarding the studied phenomenon (Khumar, 2008).

DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS

Data were gathered by means of a questionnaire which was made up close-ended questions. The questionnaire was chosen because as Borg and Gall (2009) observe, it has the ability to reach many respondents who are at widely dispersed addresses and preserves anonymity which encourages greater honesty. However, Borland (2011) argues, the questionnaire generally has a low response rate and is inflexible in that it does not allow ideas or comments to be explored in-depth and many questions may remain unanswered. The researchers personally distributed the questionnaires to be selected respondents at their colleges. The same method was used to collect the collected questionnaires. The questionnaire produced descriptive statistics around the variables under study. These statistics were computed and inferential implications from them derived and rewarded.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The study sought to explore the contributions made by private colleges in the provision of secondary education in Zimbabwe. This section is presented in two parts namely, presentation of data and discussion.

PRESENTATION OF DATA

Table 1: Profiles of respondents by gender (N=200)

Sex	Frequency	Percentage
Male	90	45
Female	110	55
Total	200	100

As table 1 reveals, 45% of the respondents were male and 55% were female. The datum was considered statistically significant to the extent that it confirmed the wide-held hypothesis that more pupils in Zimbabwean private colleges are girls.

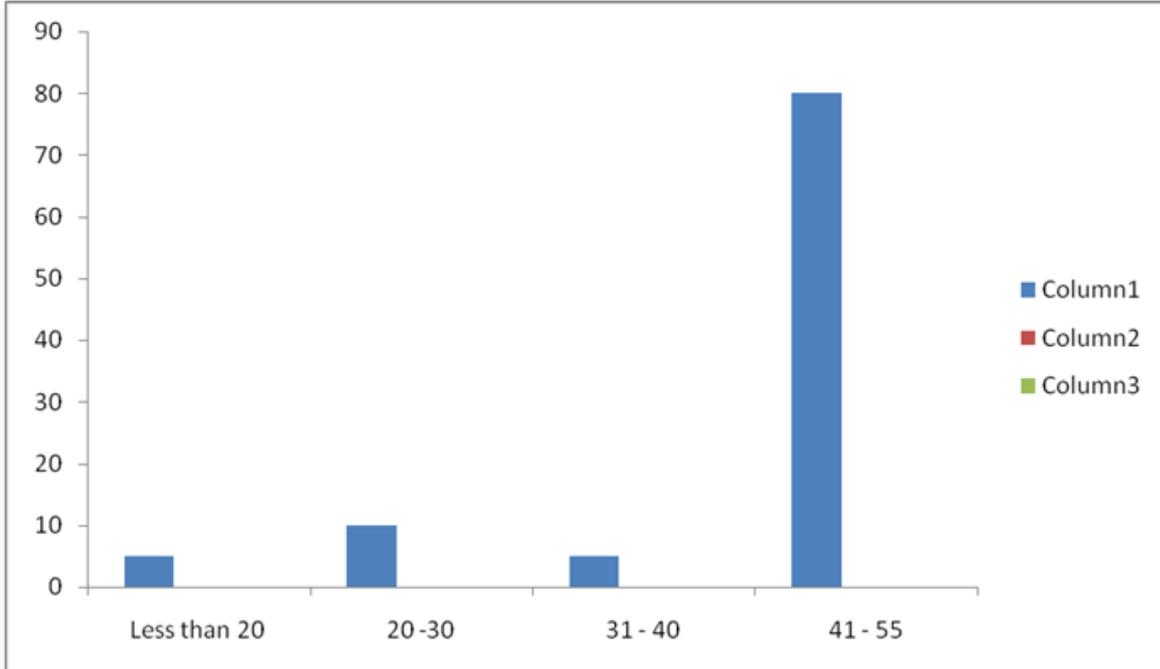


Figure 1: Number of pupils per class (N=200)

Figure 1 above shows that 80% of the respondents indicated that there were between 41 and 55 pupils in their classes. The 31-40 class sizes constituted 5% and the 20-30 constituted 10% and a few had classes of less than 20 pupils.

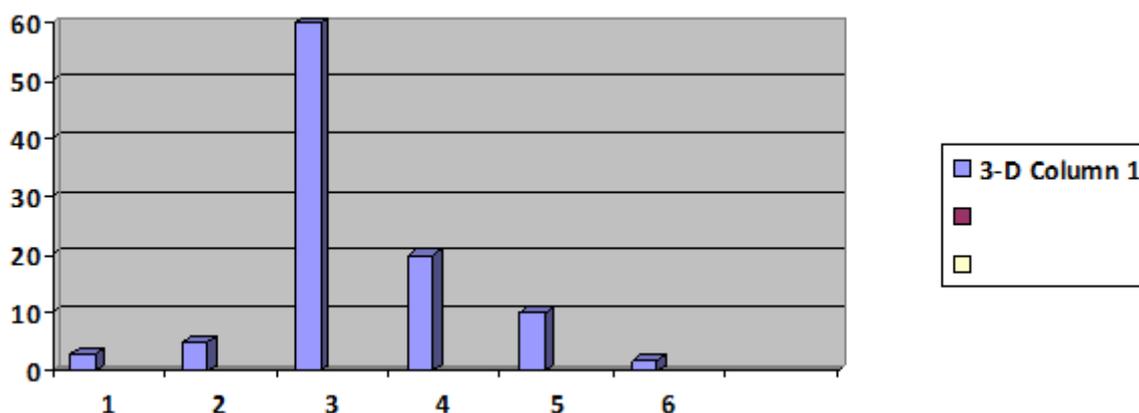


Figure 2: Number of subjects enrolled for by each pupil (N=200).

The figure above shows that over 88% of the pupils had registered for less than five subjects. Those registered five subjects and above were only 12% of the respondents.

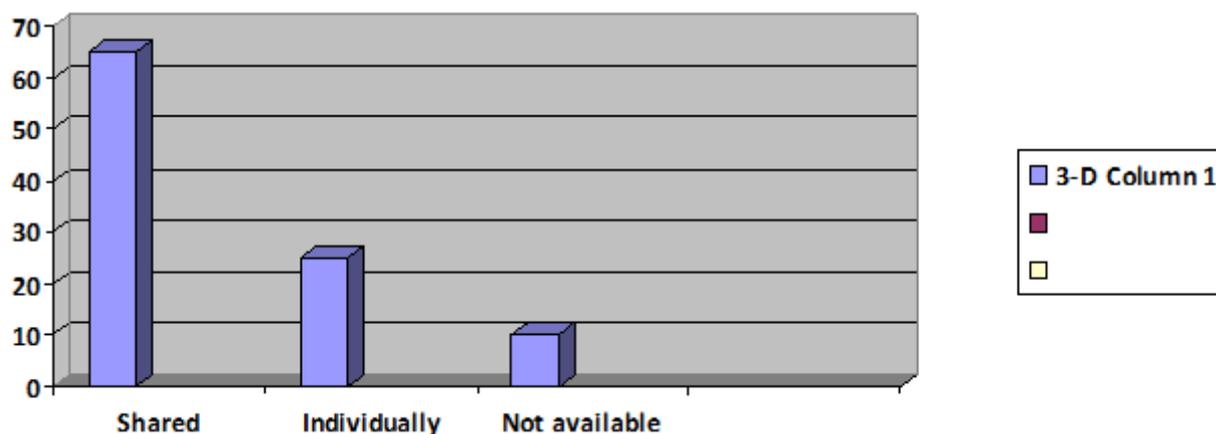


Figure 3: Distribution of textbooks for registered subjects amongst pupils (N=200).

The information on figure 3 reveals that the majority of respondents indicated that they were sharing textbooks. They constituted 65% of the sample respondents. Those who were not sharing constituted 25% and those who indicated that they did not have textbooks constituted 10% of the respondents.

Table 2: Responses to the question: "Teachers provide adequate support during the teaching/learning process" (N=200)

Category of responses	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly Agree	38	19
Agree	14	7
Disagree	48	24
Strongly Disagree	80	40
Not Sure	20	10
Total	200	100

Table 2 above reveals that the majority of respondents strongly disagreed with the statement that their teachers were providing adequate support during the learning/ teaching process. They constituted 40%. Those who disagreed were 24% of the respondents. Those who strongly agreed and agreed constituted 26% of the respondents. Respondents who indicated that they were not sure constituted 10% of the respondents.

Table 3: Responses to the statement: "The classroom environment was always good for our learning" (N=200).

Category of responses	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly Agree	20	10
Agree	22	11
Disagree	50	25
Strongly Disagree	100	50
Not Sure	8	4
Total	200	100

Table 3 above shows that the majority of the respondents (75%) indicated that their classroom environment was not always good for their learning. Those who indicated that it was always good constituted 21% of the sample respondents. Only 4% indicated that they were not sure about the question.

Table 4: Responses to the statement: "Teachers are always absent from school leaving us to do work alone" (N=200).

Category of response	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly Agree	80	40
Agree	50	25
Disagree	44	22
Strongly Disagree	26	13
Not Sure	0	0
Total	200	100

Table 4: Table above reveals that the majority of the respondents (65%) agreed with the statement that their teachers were always absent from work. Those who disagreed constituted 35% of the sample respondents.

Table 5: Responses to the question: "Which sporting activities do you take part in at your college" (N=200).

Category of respondents	Frequency	Percentage
Football	70	35
Netball	59	29
Volleyball	5	3
Athletics	15	8
Tennis	2	1
Basketball	0	0
Handball	0	0
Darts	0	0
None	48	24
Total	200	100

Information on table 5 above reveals that the majority of respondents indicated that they participated in football (35%) and netball (29%). A few indicated that they participate in volleyball (5%), athletics (15%) and tennis (2%). A significant (24%) of the respondents indicated that they did not participate in any sporting activity.

DISCUSSION

Data from the study reveal that the majority of the respondents were girls or female. This shows that there are more girls in most private colleges than there are boys. These findings tally with observations made by Burns (2010) who stated that most of the students who learn in community and non-formal colleges possess some characteristics which are negatively associated with education. Such students include most girls who dropped-out from mainstream school through pregnancy or those who work as baby-minders.

Findings also indicate that respondents revealed that class sizes in their colleges were quite high. The majority were in classes with more than 40 pupils. This correlates with findings from Mhandu (2010) who found that some private colleges had children learning in overcrowded conditions far above the stipulated class size of 33 for forms 1 and 2, and 30 for forms 3 and 4.

Data also shows that most respondents indicated that they registered for less than five (5) Ordinary Level subjects which are required for a full certificate at 'O' level according to Zimbabwean standards (Bowora 2008). Perhaps, this explains the high failure rate which characterise the 'O' level results of the colleges studied. With this kind of situation it means that students would be having a lot of time in which they are not occupied.

The information from the study indicates that the majority of respondents revealed that they were sharing textbooks. Only a few had individual textbooks. This tallies with observations from Bowora (2007) who found that equipment for laboratories is usually not acquired, textbooks are usually in short supply and permanent developments like the construction of additional classrooms and administration offices are not often done.

Data discerned from the study shows that the majority of the respondents indicated that their teachers did not provide adequate support during the teaching learning process. As Dube (2009) argued, some of these private colleges have been accused of profiteering through hiring unqualified teachers who lack all the basic competencies of the teaching profession.

Findings also revealed that the majority of the respondents indicated that their classrooms did not provide conducive environments for effective learning. This observation tallies with the observations made by Mhandu (2010) who stated that some private colleges had children as young as twelve years who were exposed to adults as there is no age limit. In addition Ahmed (2013) states that some private colleges are located near sites that negatively affect pupil behaviour, for example under high tension cables or near market places.

Data also shows that respondents indicated that they did not partake in any sporting activity within their colleges. This means that some of these colleges do not address all the aspects of the Zimbabwean secondary school curriculum which views sports as a significant component.

CONCLUSIONS

Given the background of the above findings, the researchers make the following conclusions:

- Most of the pupils in private colleges are females who find themselves in these colleges because of a number of reasons.
- Most of the pupils register for less than five subjects instead of the five that constitute the standard expected in Zimbabwe at Ordinary level.
- Private colleges do not have adequate textbooks for pupils they have enrolled. Pupils share textbooks and in some extreme cases, pupils had no single textbooks.
- Some of the teachers employed by private colleges did not provide adequate support to the learners. This could be as a result of lack of competence in the various subject areas.
- Classroom conditions in some colleges did not provide conducive environments for effective learning.
- Private colleges in most of the cases provided sporting disciplines like football and netball. A few however, did not provide any sporting disciplines to their pupils.

RECOMMENDATIONS

In light of the findings of this study, the researchers would like to make some recommendations.

- The government should constantly monitor developments at private colleges since most of the students are girls who dropped out from mainstream schools who are likely to negatively influence younger pupils at private colleges.
- Private college owners should adhere to stipulated class sizes if ever they want to promote quality education for their pupils.
- Pupils should be encouraged to register five or more subjects to increase chances of these pupils obtaining full ordinary level certificates.
- There is need to staff develop teachers so that they are equipped with competencies that will help them professionally guide their pupils.

- Private colleges' authorities should make sure that pupils learn under conducive classroom environments for effective learning to take place. Colleges should not be sited near market places where there is noise.
- Private colleges are commended for providing sporting activities for their pupils. However, they are encouraged to motivate all pupils to partake in sporting activities.

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