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Exploring the Practice of "Extra" Lessons as Offered in Chinhoyi Urban Secondary Schools, Mashonaland West Province, Zimbabwe

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Abstract: The purpose of the study was to establish the practice of extra lessons in Chinhoyi urban secondary schools in Zimbabwe. A case study was adopted to facilitate an in-depth understanding of the practice of extra lessons in schools. Purposive sampling was used to select the two schools for the study and the participants. A total of 160 participants were used to solicit information for the study. Questionnaires, interview schedules and observation checklists were enlisted for gathering data for the study. The study established that extra lessons targeted those students who could pay for the service rendered; were being carried out during normal school hours, lunch hour, after school hours and weekends; the activities were not being supervised; popular with pupils preparing for public examinations; promoted elitism and unequal access to education; provided lucrative employment for teachers; were a result of shoddy teaching during normal hours and that pupils would benefit more if extra lessons are supervised and coordinated. The study recommends that extra lessons be done outside normal school hours, with parents having the honours to identify the tutors, discuss areas of the learner's concerns with them and monitor progress made during the lessons. The study also recommends that extra lessons should be supervised and coordinated if students are to effectively benefit .School Development Committees should discuss with parents and come up with modalities to incentivise teachers so that all students benefit and that policy makers need to take a decisive position on the status of extra lessons in schools.

Key words: moonlighting, reality definer, questionable teaching, survival strategy, school development committee, case study

1. INTRODUCTION

The culture of extra lessons has become part and parcel of the Zimbabwe education system. According to Masuku (2009) extra lessons have become a mixture of entrepreneurship and

exploitation, with however many parents failing to cope and some children losing out. One can infer that extra lessons have brought mixed feelings among the people with some students being negatively affected by this practice. A lot has been written about extra lessons and their increasing prominence in education systems (Tokwe and Bwititi, 2010; Masuku, 2009; Ndleal, 2009; Paviot, 2005; Paviot et al, 2008). However, very little is empirically known about the practice and implications of this phenomenon. These omissions have motivated the researchers to undertake a study to establish the practice and its implications in Chinhoyi urban schools.

It has been observed that teachers are giving students the impression that syllabi cannot be covered during normal teaching time (Ndleal, 2009).As a result extra lessons have increasingly become the order of the day in Zimbabwean schools. However, some parents cannot afford to pay for extra lessons and some have vowed not to pay for extra lessons (Herald 9 September, 2009; Kwenda, 2007). Extra lessons have also added an extra burden on parents who are already struggling to pay for tuition and uniforms. Of late a number of teachers' homes have been converted to mini-classrooms for extra lessons. These observations among others have raised the following research questions.

2. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The questions that guided the study were:

1. How are extra lessons being implemented in schools?
2. What are the stakeholders' views (parents, teachers, students) on the practice of extra lessons?
3. How can the practice of extra lessons be improved?

3. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The study is guided by the Conflict theory (Giddens, 1993; Schaefer 2006) who project that society is a struggle for dominance among the social groups. One can argue that society is a manifestation of class diversity and power distribution. Privileged members of the society create rules for success and opportunities, usually denying less privileged members such success and opportunities (wwwallfreeeassays.com/topic/conflict-theory-education.) Implied is the fact that dominant members of the society determine the fate of their subordinates, hence the tendency for society to reproduce itself. Meighan and Siraj-Blatchford (1997) project that teachers portray themselves as controllers of the scarce and valuable commodity of knowledge. One can deduce that teachers can be reality definers with the potential to facilitate students' careers or hold them back through distribution of knowledge at their disposal.

According to Haralambos and Holborn (1995) groups in society have fundamentally different interests and as such some people will benefit more from education than others. This is supported by Giddens, (1993) and Schaefer (2006) who claim that there exist sharp inequalities in the educational opportunities available to different racial and ethnic groups. It can therefore, be argued that a lot of disparities are found in the provision of education opportunities in many societies.Meighan and Siraj-Blatchfordd,(1997)and Schaefer (2006)

also observe that schools socialise students into values dictated by the powerful in society and that disadvantaged children are denied educational opportunities offered to children of the affluent. One can deduce that educational opportunities are subject to affordability .This scenario limits the aspirations of the children of the poor and perpetuate differences in education provision and future incomes.

According to Bowels and Gintis cited in Haralambos and Holborn (1995:737) "children of the wealthy and powerful tend to obtain high qualifications and highly rewarding jobs, irrespective of their abilities". One can infer that children of the rich are privileged to access high quality education and subsequently better paying jobs. Schooling legitimises inequality and limits personal development to forms compatible with authority through justification of privilege and attributing poverty to personal failure (Giddens, 1993).It can be argued that education is used to make one accept and justify his/her position in the social strata. Acknowledged is the notion that education is an instrument for reinforcing social inequalities, since it subscribes to the needs of those in corridors of power at the expense of the poor.

4. BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

Extra lessons in Zimbabwe were established over 20 years ago as an approach to working with children having learning and behavioral difficulties on a one to one with professionally trained practitioners (www.extralesson.com.2009). Implied is the idea that extra lessons were normally designed to assist students with special needs and individual tuition was envisaged to maximize the gains of the exercise. Bray (2009) and Paviot et al (2008) argue that increased competition for places and passing of specific national examinations has driven parents to seek extra lessons for their children .One can infer that parents are being driven by the anxiety to ensure their children do well in public examinations and the need to access good schools to increase chances of a bright future for their children. So in a way the extra lessons are an avenue to supplement learning of school related material in a bid to increase the student's chances of doing well in public examinations.

Tokwe (2010) claims that historically extra lesson in the Zimbabwe education system was a remediation avenue negotiated by parents with a reputable teacher to assist a child experiencing learning difficulties in a particular subject. Inferred is the idea that extra lessons were designed to help struggling pupils catch up with others .This is also supported by (Bray, 2009) who claims that extra lessons are normally for pupils with special needs. This suggests that extra lessons are for a minority of students who may be having problems in grasping concepts during normal school hours. However, with the Zimbabwean education system, having been beset by an avalanche of problems the conduct of extra lessons has taken a new dimension.

Of late the Zimbabwe education system has been characterised by questionable teaching. Continuous strikes and the brain drain have paralysed the public schools (Kwenda, 2007; UNICEF 2008; Tokwe, 2010). Persistent work stoppages and loss of personnel have severely weakened the Zimbabwean education system. According to Kwenda (2007) and

Ndleal (2009) teachers who have remained in public schools spend most of their normal working hours moonlighting due to low remuneration. Implied is the assertion that teachers in public schools have neglected their core business, focusing on crafting survival means.

One of the survival strategies employed by teachers has been to engage students in extra lessons for a fee as a way of supplementing their incomes to sustain their families. Ndleal (2009) and Masuku (2007) argue that teachers have given the students the impression that in the prevailing environment the syllabuses cannot be adequately covered during normal school hours and that it is in their best interest to embark on extra lessons. One can point out that teachers have deliberately created the demand for extra lessons and impressed upon students that they stand to benefit from engaging in extra lessons. Definitely one would not expect school syllabuses to be adequately covered during normal school hours in the prevailing environment. Ndleal (2009) also observes that during extra lessons teachers cover subject matter thoroughly and comprehensively in contrast to the rushed manner that characterizes normal teaching sessions. This is supported by Bray (2009) who observed that teachers explain subject matter superficially, without going into details during normal teaching hours. One can argue that teachers have deliberately neglected their normal duties to expand demand for extra lessons; hence student participation in extra lessons is now a basic need.

Masuku (2009) observes that teachers are demanding from US$5 to US$ 20 per subject, per month for extra lessons The fees charged by the teachers are on the high side considering that the generality of the parents can not afford to pay . Some parents have vowed that they will not pay for extra lessons (Kwenda, 2007; Herald 9 September, 2009). One can infer that some parents have strongly objected to the practice of paying teachers for extra lessons. Hence some students are bound to lose out and this will in turn affect their future livelihoods and incomes. One can conclude that in Zimbabwean public schools education has become a private good determined by market forces.

5. RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

The research design adopted for this study was a case study (Best and Khan, 1993; Gall and Ball, 1996; Cosby, 2003), which is a way of organizing data for the purpose of viewing social reality. The case study approach is an in-depth study of practices, perceptions, effects and trends, in natural settings. It enables the researcher to make detailed descriptions (Gall and Ball, 1996).The study benefits from the case study's ability to use a variety of instruments for data collection. The study employed a variety of data gathering methods which included spot observations, face to face interviews with students, parents and teachers and questionnaires for students, parents and teachers.

Instrumentation and data collection

Questionnaires, interview guide and an observation checklist were used to solicit information on the conduct of extra lessons. Questionnaires sought students', teachers' and parents' views on the implementation of extra lesson and strategies that could be used to make students benefit more from extra lessons. Questionnaires were found to be ideal since

the population was literate, had an advantage of speed in administration, ensured anonymity of response and ensured standardization through comparison between cohorts. The questionnaire was made up of both closed and open ended questions. The open ended questions solicited for the participants' views towards extra lessons and suggestions for improvement on the practice. Face to face interviews were conducted with 8 parents, 12 students and 10 teachers to provide in-depth understanding of the participants' views towards extra lessons and possible areas of improvement. Interviews were also important to parents due to their flexibility and high response rate. The observation checklist was used to verify times extra lessons were conducted, numbers of students involved and the amount of work covered during extra lessons in schools. Observation was done covertly, to allow normal flow of activities.

A research assistant was identified in each of the two schools. The research assistants were briefed of the research objectives and inducted on the application of the questionnaires and observation checklist. Questionnaires for students and teachers were administered and collected after an hour to ensure a high response rate. Questionnaires for parents were given to respective students for completion and collected by the assistant researchers after two days for onward transmission to the researcher. Observation checklist remained with the assistant researchers for a month. Interviews were conducted informally, face to face by the researcher with the targeted participants. Recording was done by taking notes and by reconstruction after discussions through triangulation of research notes.

Population, sample and sampling techniques

The study targeted form 3 and 4 students, teachers and parents whose children were attending extra lessons from two purposively sampled secondary schools in Chinhoyi urban. The schools were selected on the basis of accessibility, availability and that they had extra lessons and participants had different views to extra lessons. It was strongly felt that the participants were directly affected by the conduct of extra lessons in one way or the other and would, therefore, provide valuable and reliable information on the practice.

A total of 160 participants (80 students, 40 teachers and 40 parents) purposively sampled took part in the study.

6. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The results were presented and discussed with respect to the research questions. Collected responses were screened for completeness first and the frequencies of practices of extra lessons were tabulated. 5 questionnaires were found to have no responses on views and strategies to improve practice and were discarded. Percentages were calculated for each variable to facilitate comparison and detailed descriptions of activities were instituted.

Table 1: Distribution of respondents, N = 160.

Respondents	Males	Females	Frequency (%)
Students	40	40	50
Teachers	20	20	25
Parents	25	15	25
Total	85	75	100

The majority of the participants (50%) were students (Table 1). Students are affected most by the conduct of extra lessons through active participation. The students should be able to provide honest and reliable information for the study.

Table 2: Times when extra lessons are conducted, N = 160

Period	Teachers	Students	Parents	Frequency (%)
Normal school time	15	46	10	44.4
After school hours	7	20	13	25.0
During weekends	8	8	12	17.5
Lunch hour	10	6	5	13.1
Total	40	80	40	100

The majority of the respondents (44.4%) indicated that extra lessons were being carried out during normal school hours. The teaching of extra lessons during normal teaching hours has serious implications on the activities of the main stream education system. The least respondents (13.1%) claimed that extra lessons were being done during lunch hour. This denies students involved the opportunity to enjoy their lunches and rest.

Table 3: Learning activity during extra lessons, N = 120

Activity	No of students	No of teachers	Total	Frequency (%)
Carried out revision work	25	12	37	30.8
Covered new material	55	28	83	69.2
Total	80	40	120	100

The majority of the respondents (69.2%) pointed out that new material was covered during extra lessons. This is contrary to www.extralesson.2009 and Tokwe (2010) who project that extra lessons should be utilized to revise areas in which students are encountering problems.

Table 4: Weaknesses in the implementation of extra lessons, N = 160

Weakness	students	teachers	Parents	Total	Frequency (%)
Lack of supervision	28	4	13	45	28,1
No individual attention	20	4	9	33	20.6
No fixed timetable	10	15	5	30	18.8
Teaching new concepts	17	6	6	29	18.1
Limited parental	5	11	7	23	14.4

participation					
Total	80	40	40	160	100

The majority of the participants (28.1%) indicated that the extra lessons were not supervised. This exposes the conduct of extra lessons subject to abuse by teachers at the expense of the student. About (20.6%) of the participants raised concerns on lack of individual attention. Interviews revealed that individual tuition could only be arranged for at a high cost. Only (14.4%) lamented that there was limited participation by parents in the manner in which extra lessons were being executed. Parents provide both the students and the financial resources for extra lessons; hence they should be actively involved for effective implementation of the exercise.

Table 5: Strategies to improve the conduct of extra lessons, N = 160

Strategy	Students	Teachers	Parents	Total	(%)
Parental participation	35	15	10	60	37.5
Reducing number of students per session	20	4	9	33	20.6
Having extra lessons after school	11	5	8	24	15.0
Authorities acknowledge existence of extra lessons	5	10	7	22	13.8
Revising work done in class	9	6	6	21	13.1
Total	80	40	40	160	100

The majority (37.5%) advocated for the active participation of parents in conduct of extra lessons. Parental support and involvement is the key to ensure maximum benefits for their children. They should be appraised on what is being done and how since they provide the students and the financial resources. About (20.6%) agitated for the reduction of the number of students per session. This move would enable the teacher to cater for individual differences and the students could benefit more.18.8% of the participants lamented the lack of a fixed timetable, which resulted in clashes of interest and students missing out other sessions. Only (13.1%) pointed out that extra lessons should be used to revise work done in class. This finding is consistent with (www.extralesson.com.2009) who asserts that extra lessons should be used to assist pupils having learning difficulties.

Data were also sought through observations and interviews. The following emerging themes were established:

- Extra lessons were conducted in teachers' offices during normal teaching time.
- Teachers either briefly appeared for normal lessons and retreated to their bases or did not bother to attend preferring to attend to students for extra lessons. This

finding is consistent with Bay (2009) who established that teachers involved in private teaching do not take their classroom teaching seriously.

- Most of the extra lessons were being carried out by respective subject teachers.
- Teachers respected their schedules for after school extra lessons.
- Exorbitant charges were a major limitation to this practice.
- The practice promoted elitism and unequal access to education.
- School Heads were aware of the practice of extra lessons but did not take any intervention measures.
- Extra lessons classes ranged from about 5 to 40 pupils.
- Extra lessons activities were disrupting normal learning in schools.
- The majority of parents were against the conduct of extra lessons in schools. This finding concurs with that of Kwenda, (2007) and Chikova (2010) who observe that some parents were refusing to pay for extra lessons accusing teachers of ripping them off.

All the 12 teachers interviewed vowed that extra lessons would continue unless teachers were viably remunerated. The following sentiments support this.

- "Either parents pay for extra lessons or their children will suffer the consequences." Teacher T.
- "Some of these problems we will complete during the extra lesson" remarked the mathematics teacher U while concluding the lesson.
- "Mbudzi inodya payakasungirwa." (An individual should benefit from where one is working). Confided teacher V.
- "Some of these young teachers are into extra lessons for money only, they do not have the students at heart" claimed senior teacher X.
- "It is a game of numbers, the more students you can attend to, the more money you can take home." Teacher Y.

School Heads professed ignorance about the existence of extra lessons in their schools. Surprisingly, One School Head indicated that "no parent had approached him on the provision of extra lessons and if ever extra lessons did take place it was through clandestine activities between parents and concerned teachers." One can argue that the School Heads were exonerating themselves from the conduct of extra lessons in schools under their guidance or were out of touch with activities taking place. However, an internal circular posted at the notice board of one of the schools dated 10 May 2010, warned teachers that it was an act of misconduct to engage students in extra/remedial lessons without the authority of school authorities. This was an acknowledgement that extra lessons were being done in the school.

Most parents and pupils indicated that extra lessons were their only hope for increasing pupils' chances of doing well in public examinations. The following sentiments support this stance:

- "I discuss with the teacher how he/she is going to assist my son." Parent A.
- "I have to make sure my daughter gets assistance somehow in preparation towards the public exams" Parent B.
- "Teaching during normal school is suspect, so one has to look for reputable teachers to assist the child after hours." Parent C.
- "Very little learning takes place during normal school lessons, so I have resorted to extra lessons to enhance my chances of passing." Student G.
- "During extra lessons my Geography teacher gives me detailed notes, explains them and gives me assignments to work on." Student H.

The study established that the focus of extra lessons had shifted from assisting needy pupils on a one to one basis to targeting all students in the school system. Hence it had become substitute for the under performing normal school system.

7. CONCLUSIONS

The study established that extra lessons were targeting only those students with the capacity to pay for the private tuition; being implemented in an uncoordinated manner; conducted during normal school hours, during lunch hour, after hours and week-ends. Students were being driven to extra lessons due to suspect normal hours teaching ; the practice promoted elitism and unequal access to education; school heads were aware of the conduct of extra lessons during normal school hours but were doing very little to stop the practice. Parents have lost faith in the quality of education which their children were getting from public schools. Both pupils and parents considered extra lessons as a viable option for preparing students for public examinations. Teachers indicated that extra lessons were a lucrative form of employment and would not give it up until the government adequately remunerated them.

The study makes the following recommendations on the conduct of extra lessons:

- Extra lessons should be done outside normal school teaching hours, so that teachers can attend to their core business during normal hours.
- Only revision of work covered in class should be done.
- Parents should identify the tutors, discuss areas of learners' concerns and monitor progress made during extra lessons.
- Teachers should be committed to assisting individual pupils on a one to one basis.
- Extra lessons should be sanctioned by school authorities and supervised if students are to benefit from the exercise.
- The School Development Committees (SDCs) should table the practice in parents meetings with the view to incentivize teachers so that no students are disadvantaged.
- The Ministry of Education, Sport and Culture should take a realistic position on the teaching of extra lessons in secondary schools.
- Further research is called on to ascertain the effectiveness of extra lessons and evaluate the practice at district and national levels.

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